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The Art And Science Of Transition: A Descriptive Case Study Between A Two- And A Four-Year Institution

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THE ART AND SCIENCE OF TRANSITION: A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY BETWEEN A TWO- AND A FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTION

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PERMISSION

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Kaylyn Bondy
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ABSTRACT

The vast majority of students who enroll in a two-year college intend to earn a bachelor's degree. However, only about 14% transfer and earn a bachelor's degree within six years (Jenkins & Fink, 2016). The need to increase the number of bachelor's degree holders (Torpey, 2018), and the increasing number of students beginning at two-year institutions demands the creation of smoother transfer pathways (Handel, 2013). Vertical transfer students comprise a majority of transfer-related studies, however, little research has focused on the efficiency and efficacy of that process (Gard, Paton, & Gosselin, 2012). Institutions can strengthen transfer student resources with a better understanding of students' transfer experiences.

This study sought to understand and analyze the creation and improvement of a vertical transfer program through the lens of Deming's Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle (The W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017). A descriptive case study methodology examined one vertical transfer program between a two-year and a four-year institution. Participant interviews, observations, and documents were gathered and analyzed to holistically examine the vertical transfer program's complexities in its natural context.

The six recurring themes emerging from the data uncovered the program's strengths, but also the challenges the program has faced. Though many of the challenges provided an opportunity for program growth and improvement, participants outlined remaining challenges. Recommendations for future practice are developing a transfer culture, developing institutional partnerships, training employees and incentivizing transfer. By implementing these recommendations, institutions can positively impact student transfer.

Given the lack of extant research on how institutions create and improve vertical transfer programming, this case study unveiled how one program lived out its creation and improvement

process. Future researchers can use the current study to further expand the student transfer knowledge base by evaluating transfer goal effects, exploring faculty influence on transfer, examining developmental education's transfer impact, including student perspectives, as well as conducting qualitative research.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges play a vital role in American higher education. Open admission policies, low tuition rates, and geographic proximity to students make these institutions a crucial gateway to postsecondary education for many students. First-generation students, students from low-income families, and returning adults are examples of some of the diverse student populations taking advantage of community college educational opportunities (Ma & Baum, 2016). Nearly half of students beginning their postsecondary career begin at a community college. In fall 2014, 42% of all undergraduate students and 25% of all full-time undergraduate students were enrolled in community colleges (Ma & Baum, 2016).

The United States' rapidly evolving economy demands skilled employees. According to the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, by 2020, 35% of all jobs opening will require at least a bachelor's degree (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Though the 2020 deadline of this comprehensive report has come and gone, one of the original author's, Nicole Smith, confirmed that those percentages will remain nearly stable for the center's anticipated 2027 prediction (Blumenstyk, 2020). According to the same report, by 2020 the United States will fall short of that number by five million workers with postsecondary education given the current production rate. Furthermore, the United States lags behind global competitors in postsecondary attainment; America currently ranks ninth in global postsecondary attainment (McFarland et al., 2018). According to Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development (OECD) data (McFarland et al., 2018), 70% of young adults ages 25-34 in South Korea have completed education beyond high school. Rates in Japan and Canada are near 60%, while young adults in the U.S. are hovering at 48%. Though it is known that community college student populations comprise various age groups, the data above is a general indicator that the United States lags behind world leaders in postsecondary attainment. Educational attainment trends that cannot meet employment demands can negatively impact the economy; therefore, improved student success is a current concern in higher education.

Among first-time students who enrolled in community colleges in the fall of 2007 with the intention of earning some kind of degree, 33% transferred to a four-year institution within six years. However, only 14% of those who transferred earned a bachelor's degree in six years (Gose, 2017). The persistence of community college transfers to successful completion at four-year institutions has become a prominent conversation and concern in higher education. Around the country, community colleges and universities are teaming up to improve the unimpressive bachelor's-degree completion rates for community-college transfer students. In response, institutions are attempting to remove transfer barriers to improve student attainment (Gose, 2017).

Background of the Problem

A high school diploma is no longer enough to ensure the required skills for a good-paying career. By 2020, it was estimated that 65% of all job openings will require postsecondary education or training (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Though not yet released, the updated report which will provide predictions through 2027 for jobs requiring postsecondary training are anticipated to remain the same (Blumenstyk, 2020). Furthermore, 11 of the 15 fastest-growing occupations will require postsecondary education (Biden & Garcetti, 2016).

The concern for a better-educated America not only stems from filling future job openings that will require postsecondary education but has far reaching positive effects. Success in postsecondary education translates into improved employability and higher incomes (Koropeckyj, Lafakis, & Ozimek, 2017). Individuals with only a high school degree are roughly twice as likely to be unemployed as are bachelor's degree holders of the same age. Those who have achieved higher postsecondary education are also more active and effective concerning community participation and civic life (Koropeckyj, Lafakis, & Ozimek, 2017). Evidence also suggests that greater educational success translates into better parenting and reduced likelihood of criminal activity (Koropeckyj, Lafakis, & Ozimek, 2017). Moreover, the economic benefits of a better-educated population extend not only to individuals but to the economy as a whole. College-educated workers spend more time in the workforce and display higher productivity while working (Koropeckyj, Lafakis, & Ozimek, 2017).

Assuring individuals can access the postsecondary education that will be needed in the future employment market is a concern for the United States. Specifically, financing a college education is a difficulty for many Americans. The United States has suffered from rising income inequality for decades. Middle class American households have experienced rising income inequality, slow growth in living standards, as well as other key economic challenges since 1979 (Mishel, Gould, & Bivens, 2015). Income inequality and middle-class living standards have made their way to the political agenda; however, rising tuition costs, coupled with stagnant middle-class growth, are putting college out of reach for many students (Mishel, Gould, & Bivens, 2015). Ensuring that all Americans have the opportunity to reach their full potential and contribute to the country's success, via affordable, accessible higher education can assure that it is a possibility for more students (Biden & Garcetti, 2016).

America's community colleges are uniquely positioned to fulfill the responsibility of providing affordable, accessible education. As summarized by Ma and Baum (2016), "In 2015-16, the average published tuition and fee price is $3,435 for full-time public two-year in-district students, 37% of the average price for public four-year in-state students and 11% of that for private nonprofit four-year students" (p. 11). The staggering price difference between two- and four-year institutions promotes two-year college enrollment for students who face financial concerns. In 2015-16, full-time students in the public two-year sector received an estimated average of about $4,210 in total grant aid and education tax benefits, which is enough to cover the average published tuition and fee price, as well as a portion of other expenses (Ma & Baum, 2016). Not only does price play a role in accessing higher education, but the amount of aid to cover necessary expenses can, as well. As the most recent statistic of the sort, 90% of the population lives within 25 miles of one of the more than 1,300 community colleges (Biden & Garcetti, 2016). These institutions are able to meet students where they are typically at a more affordable price, serving as gateways to a new career or a four-year degree.

Lower costs and convenient locations have positioned community colleges as the first choice of a majority of students entering higher education. However, community colleges are only a part of the solution for students wishing to earn a baccalaureate degree and for employers who seek graduates with baccalaureate degrees. Community college students must transfer to earn a bachelor's degree. Successful transfer to a four-year institution and baccalaureate degree completion rates of transfer students have become a topic of concern.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, higher education has come under scrutiny for various reasons. "For nearly a decade, a chorus of higher education pundits, policy makers, and politicians have been

sounding the alarm regarding the relatively low productivity of U.S. colleges and universities in producing students with certificates and degrees" (Handel, 2013, p. 5). National statistics show that only about half of the students who begin college at a two- or four-year institution earn a degree within six years (Lewinjan, 2013). Such rates are drawing attention to postsecondary institutions' productivity. Along with completion concerns, the national debate about the cost of higher education has also intensified. Increased college costs drive questions about the affordability, value and the return on investment of higher education for many families. The debate continues even though research points to strong economic benefits from earning a college education (Seltzer, 2017).

Those who criticize the productivity and value of higher education are calling on institutions to reduce barriers to degree completion for qualified students. E. Gordon Gee, current president of West Virginia University, stated that all communities in higher education, including community colleges, research institutions, public universities and small liberal arts colleges, should agree that completion must be higher education's most important priority (Lewinjan, 2013). Although the college completion discussion focuses on increasing the number of individuals with certificates and degrees of all types, recent analyses specifically indicate need to increase the number of bachelor's degree holders as the U.S. will need additional postsecondary-educated workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2017; Handel, 2013).

The solution for increased bachelor's degree holders in the United States must focus on the successful completion of students attending four-year institutions. However, understanding the admission pipeline into a four-year institution is part of this focus. Students can enroll in a four-year institution directly from high school, but other pathways to admission exist. As stated

above, nearly half of students beginning their postsecondary career begin at a community college (Ma & Baum, 2016). Understanding specific student populations, such as vertical, or two- to four-year institutional transfer (Bahr, 2012), may assist in improving bachelor's degree completion rates.

The increasing number of students beginning their postsecondary education at two-year institutions is demanding the creation of smoother transfer pathways (Handel, 2013). More than a third of all college students move from one college to another at least once in their academic careers, therefore all types of institutions must be concerned with the student transfer process (Lederman, 2017). Increasing the effectiveness of two- to four-year college transfer is critical for meeting national goals for college attainment and promoting upward social mobility. It is time for improved transfer programming that is incorporated as an integral part of an institution's strategic enrollment plan and institutional mission (The College Board, 2011).

Research on the mobility of community college students has focused almost exclusively on the study of vertical transfer (Doyle, 2009), or students who transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions (Bahr, 2012). Intense attention has been given to vertical transfer students specifically because vertical transfer is a critical step to earning a baccalaureate degree (Bahr, 2012; Long & Kurlaender, 2009). Vertical transfer students are the center of a majority of transfer-related studies; however, little research has focused on the actual mechanism of the transfer process between the two venues and the efficiency and efficacy of that process (Gard, Paton, & Gosselin, 2012). Examining institutional responses and ways in which they can encourage students to advance along the road to transfer remains an important area for research (Roska & Calcagno, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to understand and analyze the creation and improvement of vertical transfer student programming through the lens of Deming's Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle (The W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017). This study seeks to better understand how vertical transfer programming addresses vertical transfer student transition challenges by investigating the creation and improvement of a vertical transfer student program between a public, two-year college and a large, public, four-year research university in the Midwest region of the United States.

Framework

Though typically implemented in business-related situations, the Deming PDSA (Plan-Do-Study-Act) Cycle (The W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017) was employed in this study to analyze the creation and improvement processes of a vertical transfer student program. The Deming PDSA Cycle is a systematic process used to gain knowledge about the continual improvement of a product, process, or service. Though first implemented in the 1950's, the Deming PDSA cycle has been widely employed to study continual improvement processes; however, no studies have used it to understand and evaluate the implementation and improvement of a vertical transfer program. Researchers have expressed, however, how current challenges in higher education that mimic those in business-related fields could benefit from analysis through a business-related framework (Gibbs & Murphy, 2009; Magaud & Krone, 2012).

Research Question

The research was guided by one primary research question: How does a public, two-year college and a large, public, four-year research university in the Midwest region of the United States create and seek to improve vertical transfer student programming to prepare students for

vertical transfer?

Deming's PDSA (Plan, Do Study, Act) (The W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017) Cycle and Model for Improvement served as a framework for sub research questions. My research uncovered how vertical transfer student transfer programming has been planned (Plan), put into action (Do), studied (Study), and revised (Act). Also, Using the Deming's Model for Improvement (The W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017) my research worked to understand the program's improvement processes.

Study Design

A descriptive case study methodology was used to examine one vertical transfer program between a public, two-year college and a large, public, four-year research university. Multiple sources of data were gathered to promote a greater understanding of the case. Participant interviews, observations and documents were gathered and analyzed.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to understand and analyze the creation and improvement of vertical transfer student transfer programming through the lens of Deming's Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle. Early research on transfer students has focused more on quantitative data related to transfer shock and academic success. However, recent studies have focused on examining the transfer student experience. Few studies have tried to connect the transfer student experience with how institutions are creating and improving transfer programming, specifically using Deming's PDSA Cycle.

Students have been transferring between college and university campuses throughout the past century; and yet today, campuses still struggle to successfully transfer students to baccalaureate completion. With a better understanding of the students' transfer experiences,

institutions of higher education can strengthen resources provided to this student population. Institutions that create and improve programming with student assets and liabilities in mind may better assist with retention, transition, and completion. Not only may students benefit from an easier transition, but with intentional vertical transfer programming, they may be better equipped to navigate future transitions, including the transition from college into the work world. Further, instructors and administrators interacting with students who are able to navigate the transition from a two-year to a four-year institution may find students are more able to engage in their classes and other college experiences.

Additionally, any increase in degree attainment equates to individual student and societal benefits as discussed above. Colleges may have more satisfied alumni and students may gain transferrable skills. While the current study focused on vertical transfer students, some of the themes discovered may apply other types of transfer students as well, or could provide a starting point for future research into ways higher education professionals can create and improve transfer programming to understand and assist other types of transfer students, and ultimately increase their retention, persistence, and completion.

Definition of Terms

Defining important terms is essential to ensure a common understanding of key concepts and terminology specific to the subject of student transfer programming. Those terms are defined below.

Articulation Agreement- Articulation agreements are frameworks that provide for the transfer of credit from one academic institution to another, encompassing statewide policies and voluntary arrangements between two and four-year institutions. Articulation agreements are often crafted to form legally binding admission requirements to specific programs, course equivalency guides,

and common course numbering systems (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Completion - Also commonly referred to as graduation, this study uses the term completion. Completion refers to students who complete or graduate their program from an institution (The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2016).

Community College – "Any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree" (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p.5).

Lateral Transfer - Lateral transfer, or movement from one institution to another of the same degree granting level, is also a common event during community college students' educational careers (Bahr, 2012).

Persistence – Persistence is the process of continued enrollment at any higher education institution until a degree is earned (The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017).

Programming – The terms programming and programs are used to discuss any interventions performed by an institution intended to produce educational or developmental benefits.

Retention - Retention is the process of continued enrollment within the same institution of higher education from semester to semester (The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017).

Reverse Transfer - Reverse transfer involves students transferring to a community college from a four-year institution (Mullin, 2012).

Swirling **-** Swirling is a complex, inter-institutional pattern of enrollment that has created a complex and dynamic environment for students and researchers (Townsend 2001). Swirling refers to the back-and-forth enrollment among two or more institutions (de los Santos & Wright, 1990).

Transfer Shock - Transfer shock (Hills, 1965) has been defined as a decline in grade point

average during the transfer students' first terms at the four- year institution.

Transfer Ecstasy - Transfer ecstasy (Nickens, 1992) has been defined as an initial increase in grade point average during the transfer students' first term at the four- year institution.

Transition- Transition is "any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006, p. 33).

Transfer Student - Students who embark upon their educational careers at one institution and, then, before they complete their goal or obtain their degree, they leave and enroll in another college/university (Bonham and Luckie, 1993).

Vertical Transfer - Students who transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions are termed vertical or upward transfers and are traditionally the group of students considered within an institution's transfer mission and its transfer rate (Bahr, 2012).

Assumptions and Delimitations

Assumptions and biases. There are assumptions with which I enter this research. One such assumption is that college is a worthwhile endeavor and that it should be a goal of a colleges to retain nearly all students, for the colleges' own purposes as well as for the benefit of individual students and society as a whole. However, attrition can be viewed as positive if students decide higher education is not for them. I grew up in the Midwest in a home that did not center solely on education, but rather focused on a hard work ethic that demanded never giving less than a personal best attempt. I attended a four-year institution after high school and believe that I have not only personally benefitted from my college experience, but that I am also able to contribute more to my community given the skills I have acquired. I do not believe that higher education is necessary or the best path for all individuals, but I do believe that higher education has endless opportunities to provide to those that pursue it and that it is not always an easy

choice for a student to take the first steps to begin. I do not have personal experience with great difficulty in higher education, however I believe an institution has an obligation to create student retention, persistence and success efforts.

I have worked in education for over ten years and have worked specifically in higher education for eight. I have worked with a variety of diverse students primarily at a community college within the context of student affairs over the past eight years. Diverse experiences with students have shaped my assumptions surrounding students, transfer, and the obligations of institutions of higher education. I believe that personal student characteristics as well as their college experiences affect retention, persistence and completion. Furthermore, I believe that most transfer students struggle with the transition from a two-year college to a four-year institution, though to widely varying degrees. As a result, an additional underlying assumption is that colleges should do everything reasonable to better understand their students and their experiences and create appropriate programming to assist students with transitions. I also believe that the better an institution understands its student population and their challenges, the better an institution is equipped to create intentional, beneficial programming.

Lastly, I approach my research with the assumptions that my methodology addresses my research questions, that I would ask the right questions and interpret the participants' experiences appropriately, and that the participants would be honest, insightful, and provide accurate perceptions of their work with vertical transfer student programming.

Delimitations.

Delimitations are factors that address how the study was narrowed in scope (Creswell, 1994), so as to preclude myself from asserting that the findings of the current study are true for all people, in all times, and in all places (Bryant, 2004). There are a number of ways in which the

study was directed so as to not focus on all transfer programming. First, the study deeply investigated one vertical transfer program that has been established between a small Midwestern two-year college to a large Midwestern research university. The institutions in this study are public and fall under the same regional accreditor and state governing board.

I collected data primarily through interviews, relying heavily on self-reported data. I interviewed administrators, staff, faculty and students that are involved with transfer programming, its creation and its improvement. Studying only one transfer program and the relatively small number of interviewees also limits the range of experiences and understandings, and the ability to generalize the findings of this study to other institutions. Additionally, I limited the time period for data collection, which could influence data and the themes produced. Current and past internal and external institutional factors may influence participant responses. Participant perceptions and understandings of their transition programming may not have the benefit of hindsight or the lessons learned if the interviews take place in later years. Further, in qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument, making meaning of the data. For this reason, my own current assumptions and understandings may affect the themes this study produces.

Additional studies may be needed to explore how other institutions are creating and improving vertical transfer programming. Future studies may carefully consider exploring transfer programming at religiously-affiliated institutions, private institutions, institutions in other accreditation regions, institutions in other state systems, predominately urban institutions, and institutions that serve more demographically diverse student populations.

Conclusion

The high rate of students who begin their postsecondary studies at a community college and transfer to four-year institutions indicate that transfer students are an integral part of four-year campus populations. The necessity to determine the challenges faced by vertical transfer students entering a four-year institution is central to understanding student mobility, persistence and completion. The challenge is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to improving transition experiences (Cole, 2017). What works on one campus may not work on another. As noted by Reason (2009), "we need to stop searching for a silver bullet, but rather should approach the challenge of increasing student persistence as an institution-specific enterprise" (p. 678). Institutions must undertake extensive analysis of all data available to better understand the forces that facilitate successful transition. Institutions must understand how appropriate theories can be modified and implemented on their campus in a way that recognizes the unique circumstances and culture of the campus (Cole, 2017). This case study extensively investigates one vertical transfer program to understand its creation and improvement process to better understand how vertical transfer programming is addressing transfer vertical student transition challenges.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Community colleges have driven the democratization of higher education by opening postsecondary access to those underserved by other colleges and universities. An initial purpose of two-year colleges was to offer students the opportunity to complete two years of undergraduate education and then provide a smooth transfer to universities for the completion of their education (Thelin, 2003). Over time, the mission has grown and varies between institutions to include vocational programs and technical degrees, literacy programs and adult education, and the transfer mission into the larger university system (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Two-year colleges serve an important role to four-year institutions because of the preparation work they provide for students wishing to obtain their baccalaureate degree. Nearly 60 % of college graduates in the U.S. have attended more than one college or university (Adelman, 2009). The high percentage of students attending multiple institutions underscores the importance of developing sound practices to facilitate student transfer.

Not only are transfer students a large percentage of the higher education population, but postsecondary institutions are also being challenged by policy makers to increase degree completion rates. “While some states have created their own attainment goals, the Obama administration established 2020 as the goal for reaching 60 percent degree attainment for the country, while the Lumina Foundation established 2025 as the goal for 60 percent of working-age adults possessing a "high-quality" credential” (Smith, 2017). The National Governors

Association has also urged institutions of higher education to produce improved outcome and progress metrics, including the tracking of transfer students (Reyna, 2010).

Community colleges are the largest postsecondary education segment and its share of the undergraduate population is likely to increase (The College Board, 2011). As such, growing community college populations may also increase transfer student numbers. The high percentage of potential transfer students coupled with the national policy attention noted prior have brought student transfer into the media spotlight. Discussions concerning student transfer to four-year institutions are extending beyond student transfer success; researchers understand the larger implications of successful student transfer. For example, baccalaureate degree attainment is a known workforce and economic driver that indicates that community college to four-year institution transfer is vital and that it must "work well" (Wellman, 2002, p. 7). Though extensive literature exists concerning the topic of student transfer in higher education, there is an existing need to further explore the strategic commitment to enroll and serve community college transfer students through interinstitutional partnerships (The College Board, 2011). Larger scale economic issues are dependent on successful student transfer and baccalaureate attainment. This chapter aims to provide an overview of vertical or upward transfer students, rather than particular sub-groups to understand the vertical transfer process and current transfer student programming initiatives.

To begin, this chapter will provide an overview of types of transfer and transfer rates, then will explore the history of articulation and transfer policy. An overview of the transfer student's experience will follow. The chapter will then outline transfer transitioning and what is required for transfer success, as well as provide examples of existing transfer programming. Finally, in the last section of this chapter, a conceptual framework using Deming's Plan-Do-

Study-Act (PDSA) Cycle will be used to examine how institutions are implementing and improving transfer programming initiatives.

Student Transfer

Transfer Types

Student transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions is referred to as "vertical or upward transfer" and is traditionally the group of students considered within an institution's transfer mission and used to calculate transfer rate (Bahr, 2012). Institutions also serve other types of transfer students. Lateral transfer, or movement from one institution to another of the same degree granting level, is also a common event during community college students' educational careers (Bahr, 2012). Students are most likely to transfer laterally early in their enrollment and are more likely to do so if they are less academically invested at their initial community college (Bahr, 2012). Reverse transfer involves students transferring to a community college from a four-year institution (Mullin, 2012). Reverse transfer students tend to enter the four-year university with less academic preparation and earn lower grades during their enrollment. Returning to the community college can allow for continued postsecondary enrollment and improved post-college outcomes as compared to students who drop out completely (Kalogrides & Grodsky, 2011). Finally, swirling is an inter-institutional pattern of enrollment that has created a complex and dynamic environment for students and researchers (Townsend 2001). Swirling often refers to the back-and-forth enrollment among two or more institutions (de los Santos & Wright, 1990).

In a survey of approximately 100,000 American community colleges students, VanderLinden (2002) identified six primary categories of reasons that students gave for their enrollment at a community college. Forty-five percent of respondents expressed an intent to

transfer vertically to a four-year institution, some of those hoping to achieve a baccalaureate degree. Others were interested in both transfer and personal and / or intellectual growth (VanderLinden, 2002). More recently, a Center for Community College Student Engagement report indicates that 49% of full-time and 46% of part-time students express that transferring to a four-year college or university as their number one goal (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2017). Such findings suggest that a nearly half of community college students aspire to complete a four-year degree program, although their path and their perceptions related to that process may vary. As nearly half of all community college students indicate the desire to transfer to a four-year institutions, it is vital to understand the various types of student transfer and the significant role that student transfer plays in a two-year institutions' mission.

Vertical Transfer

Two-year institutions serve as a critical educational gateway for a significant proportion of college students. 81% of first-time community college students indicate completing a bachelor's degree or higher as a goal (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). As a result, many four-year institutions are experiencing increased transfer student enrollment (Chrystal, Gansemer-Topf, & Laanan, 2013). Transferring from a two-year to four-year institution is the most common transfer pathway (Handel, 2011).

A great deal of literature exists specific to vertical transfer in higher education. Much of the research regarding vertical transfer, however, utilizes quantitative data and primarily concerns transfer student academic performance, transfer student enrollment, retention, and graduation rates (Townsend, 2006). In 2006, Townsend indicated the lack of existing research that had been conducted on students once they transfer to another institution. Little has known about the transfer student transition experience (Chrystal, Gansemer-Topf, & Laanan, 2013;

Townsend, 2006), therefore additional research is needed concerning effective practices designed to reduce transfer shock, address the needs of transfer students, and examine the characteristics of successful inter-institutional partnerships (Chrystal, Gansemer-Topf, & Laanan, 2013). A growing body of evidence, however, indicates that strategic supports—delivered inside and outside the classroom are key to students' abilities to achieve completion and transfer (Booth, Cooper , Karandjeff, Large, Pellegrin, Purnell, Rodriguez-Kiino, Schiorring, & Willett, 2013).

Transfer Rates

Transfer rates are typically designed to identify what percentage of students initially enroll at a community college and then subsequently enroll at a four-year institution (Bradburn, Hurst, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2001) and can vary based on the wide range of transfer definitions, as well as varying definitions of a transfer student. Varying transfer rate definitions may consider students who take classes intermittently at a community college and stop out before attending a four-year institution, or transfer rate definitions may consider those pursuing an associate's degree full-time, intending to transfer after two years of coursework. Concerning two-year to four-year transfers, Cohen and Brawer (2008) state that "although the transfer rate in most of the states with comprehensive college systems clusters around the 25 percent national mark, the range between states is from 11 to 40 percent" (p. 66).

Horn and Skomsvold (2011) found that over 80 percent of community college students intend to earn at least a bachelor's degree, however, only about a quarter end up transferring to a four-year institution. Students with higher levels of academic and social integration at the community college are also more likely to transfer (Booth et al., 2013; Nora & Rendón, 1990). Research indicates that students who begin their undergraduate work at a community college face barriers to completing four-year degree programs when compared to students with similar

characteristics and intentions who begin at a four-year university (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Such findings suggest that "problems that prevent successful completion of the bachelor's degree usually arise prior to transfer or during the transfer process" (Rifkin, 2000, p. 3).

Historical Background of Articulation and Transfer Policy

State-directed public institutions have increasingly given attention to transfer students and articulation agreements. "By the late 1970's, 40 percent of all first-time-in-college full-time freshman were in the two-year institutions" (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p.23). Between the early 1980s and early 1990s, post-secondary enrollment increased, specifically among part-time and female enrollments. Enrollment for students over the age of 25 increased significantly as did minority enrollments, especially Hispanics and Asians (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Snyder, 1994). Community college growth, institutional affordability, and federal financial aid (e.g., Pell Grants) attracted students who may have found financing education difficult. Increased access and growing enrollments reshaped campus diversity and student needs. Attention to student services rose as colleges acknowledged students who warranted specific courtesies and accommodations (Thelin, 2011). As student enrollments increased at two-year institutions, their transfer to four-year institutions to attain bachelor's-level degrees took on a new focus.

Historically, students transferring credit from community colleges to four-year institutions have encountered difficulties. The transfer process is exceedingly complex, as are student characteristics. Many states have worked to remedy this issue; streamlining the transfer of credit through implementation of articulation agreements. Such agreements not only facilitate student transfer, but they help establish congruency and certainty in respect to course transfer, as well as ensure accessibility into four-year degree programs (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Thelin, 2011). Articulation agreements are crucial to ensuring the continued education of community

college students. As Grites and McDonald (2012) point out, “articulation agreements [as well as], programs and services that facilitate students’ transition play a critical role in creating a transfer pipeline for students to continue their education beyond a 2-year college” (p. 21). The nuances of state policy and how these policies are implemented in public two-year and four-year institutions have a particular effect on students’ successful degree attainment. (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2011).

Harper-Marinick and Swarthout (2012) outlined an example of how Arizona has increased the number of transfer students by implementing a formalized articulation agreement. The formation of the Academic Program Articulation Steering Committee in 1983 brought community college and four-year institution partners together to focus on articulation agreements, policy recommendations, and articulation review. Harper-Marinick and Swarthout (2012) discuss how Arizona recommitted to improved student transfer in 1996 by mandating the development of a transfer system that ensured students would not lose credit during transfer. The Arizona General Education Curriculum developed a standard general education core to be offered at community colleges so that transfer students could incorporate community college credits or degrees efficiently into university graduation requirements. Since 2004, the number of students who have successfully transferred in Arizona has doubled (Harper-Marinick & Swarthout, 2012).

According to a report from the Education Commission of the States (2014), all but seven U.S. states now have some form of legislation, policy, or procedure in place to address articulation and/or and common course numbering among institutions. However, just because articulation agreements exist does not necessarily make the process of transferring smoother. Delmas (2012) pointed out that transfer articulation agreements are not as easy as they may

seem. For agreements to work effectively, "students need to know which 4-year institution they will attend after leaving the community college" (Delmas, 2012, p. 19). Rifkin (2000) also explained that "Articulation agreements are often designed with the traditional, steady, straightforward high school to community college to four-year college model in mind and have difficulty accommodating students' irregular coursetaking patterns" (p. 3). Furthermore, Gross and Goldhaber (2009) found that additional factors beyond articulation agreements are associated with a student's chance of transferring and earning a bachelor's degree. Gross and Goldhaber (2009) found "that the percentage of tenured faculty at the community college and the student-teacher ratios at both the community and four-year colleges are more tightly associated with a community college student's chances of transferring and earning a bachelor's degree than are state transfer and articulation policies" (p.2). As many community college students balance work and family responsibilities uncharacteristic of traditional students historically served by four-year colleges and universities, rigid agreements can create additional educational challenges. Though a step in the right direction, transfer articulation and common course numbering systems do not solve all issues related to the transfer process.

Transfer Students

Transfer Preparation

A considerable number of students who expect to earn a bachelor's degree, but begin at a community college, unfortunately never transfer (Berkner, He, & Cataldi, 2002). As stated above, Horn and Skomsvold (2011) found that over 80 percent of community college students intend to earn at least a bachelor's degree, however, only about a quarter end up transferring to a four-year institution. Over three decades of research suggests that students who begin at community colleges suffer a disadvantage in realizing their baccalaureate degree goals in

comparison to students who start as freshman at four-year institutions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). More recent research has also indicated that this disadvantage is still experienced by baccalaureate-aspiring students who attend community colleges (Long & Kurlaender, 2009). Pascarella and Terenzini (2015) argue that part of the disadvantage may be associated with whether students in fact transfer to a four-year institution. What contributes to the preparation for successful transfer to four-year institutions has become a pressing issue facing community colleges.

Research indicates that community college students who are less academically prepared departing high school are less likely to experience successful outcomes in higher education, including the completion of credentials and/or transfer to a four-year institution (Roska & Calcagno, 2010). Wang's (2009) research indicates that high school test scores significantly predict upward transfer, reinforcing how early academic performance can influence various aspects of a student's postsecondary career. Roska and Calcagno's (2010) research also found that successful completion of intermediate outcomes, such as passing college-level math and writing courses, meeting specific credit thresholds, and earning an associate's degree, enhances the probability of transfer. Students who earn lower GPAs at the community college prior to transfer are less likely to persist and graduate from a four-year institution (Dennis, Calvillo, & Gonzalez, 2008). Academic success is a vital piece in preparing students for transfer and in achieving their overall educational goals (Wang, 2009). This research demonstrates how academic success, across varied indicators has a significant impact on how students enter, transition and complete in higher education.

Outside of academic preparedness prior to and during the two-year college experience, research has alluded to other factors that may contribute to the transfer preparation of students

aspiring to attend a four-year institution. Fann (2013) stated, “that the more transfer knowledge students possess, the more likely they are to make a successful transition between institutions. Without the resources and insight required to decipher the transfer process, moving between institutions can be daunting to the point of discouraging persistence in higher education” (p.36). 75% of transfer students in another study agreed that information about resources at the four-year transfer institution would be helpful in preparing for transfer (Corkery, Ingram, & Davis, 2007). Wang (2012) concludes that community colleges should focus on identifying and developing programs and services that promote initiatives that foster close and quality contact between students and various community college socialization sources that are likely to be beneficial to the transfer preparation process. Thus, institutions must consider a multitude of factors when looking to prepare students for vertical transfer.

The Process of Transferring

Though the vertical transfer process can pose challenges, many students do, in fact, successfully transfer between institutions. Out of all students who transferred from a two-year institution, 59.2 % transferred to a four-year institution **(**Shapiro, Dundar, Huie, Wakhungu, Bhimdiwali, Nathan, & Youngsik, 2018). Many students who are transferring to four-year institutions are transferring earlier, often before obtaining an associate degree. Cejda and Kaylor (2001) found that faculty member interactions, personal factors such as changes in family status and support, other staff members and peers, and perceived issues at the community college can influence early transfer decisions. Though student transfer trends indicate early transfer often before completion of an associate’s degree, community college transfer students are more likely to earn a bachelor’s degree if they first earned an associate degree (Jenkins & Fink, 2015).

Articulation Agreements

As noted prior, articulation agreements are important formal initiatives created to improve the likelihood of student transfer and graduation. While legislated articulation agreements are seemingly positive initiatives, Kuh (2008) argues that if institutions are not held accountable for properly executing articulation agreements, successful student transfer could be compromised, and transfer students could encounter the negative ramifications. Doyle (2006) also pointed out that "acceptance of credit hours in the target institution...turns out to be key to students' success- or lack of it," (p. 58) which again signifies the extreme importance of well executed articulation agreements. How articulation agreements are developed, how successful they are in accommodating students who change their majors, and how they account for students who are considering multiple schools remains questionable. While articulation agreements are typically a state-level issue, the development and execution remains an institutional matter.

Well executed articulation agreements are vital to successful transfer. Transfer students often do not, however, understand how articulation agreements work. In her study, Townsend (2008) found that 20% of students were unsure of how many and which courses transferred. This was particularly distressing for the students in her study as advisor meetings to discuss their major courses sometimes occurred during a student's first semester, after transfer had already taken place. Students uninformed of how credit transfers and communication difficulty with advisors are examples of poor institutional articulation agreement execution by institutional staff. Articulation and credit-transfer issues are not the only transfer process challenges. Understanding other transfer-specific challenges informs how intentional transfer programming can promote successful student transfer.

Academic Transition

Hills (1965) found that the vast majority of junior college transfer students experienced a significant drop in grade point average (GPA) in their first semester at receiving institutions, and that students typically recovered to some degree in future semesters. Hills (1965) popularized the term "transfer shock" in a review of studies that examined transfer student academic performance in their first semester at receiving institutions. Transfer shock refers to the tendency of students transferring from one institution of higher education to another to experience a temporary dip in grade point average during the first or second semester at the new institution (Hills, 1965).The concept of transfer shock has been a strong focus of transfer student related research over the past several decades.

Subsequent studies have continued to document the presence of both transfer shock and recovery (Diaz, 1992). Specifically, many studies have explored transfer student grade point averages (GPA) in comparison to native student GPA's. Carlan and Byxbe (2000) studied native and transfer students' GPA changes from lower to upper level courses at an institution. Transfer students' semester GPA's were 0.3 lower than their community college cumulative GPA's after their first semester, however, it was found that these students' GPA's tended to level off after their second semester at the university, which the researchers indicated aligns with several other studies (Carlan & Byxbe, 2000). They found that transfer and native student GPA's tend to align after the first semester of a transfer student's enrollment at the new institution, but also found that native students experienced fewer issues maintaining an upper level GPA (Carlan and Byxbe, 2000). This study exemplifies Hills's (1965) idea of transfer shock and demonstrates that students are able to recover the lower GPA in their first transfer term as they adjust to their four-year institution. It may be assumed that the initial transition to a four-year institution was a factor

in lower GPAs. However, the cause of the drop in GPAs was not outlined in this study, only that that it occurred.

Other researchers have argued that the initial decrease in grades is associated with grade inflation at the community college. Friedl, Pittenger, and Sherman (2012) compared students who completed a developmental math course at a community college with those who completed the equivalent course at a university. They concluded that while community college students earned significantly higher grades in the developmental math course, they scored lower in their first college-level math course. While Friedl, Pittenger, and Sherman (2012) suggest that these differences are the result of differing academic standards, they do not account for the timing of enrollment in such courses or the possible influence of transition-related factors. Few studies have examined specific courses to determine if transfer students have difficulties stemming from past curricular experience. Over a 5-year period using student records, Whitfield (2005) compared grades in organic and biochemistry classes for transfer and native students. Results showed that biochemistry transfer students experienced significant declines in GPA as compared to native students, which did not increase over time, indicating "transfer coma" or stagnated lower achievement as opposed to "transfer shock" in coursework.

The two prior studies do not appear conclusive concerning specifically how transfer affects transfer shock, however it does document that transfer may correlate to transfer student academic difficulty. Specific course work conducted at a two-year institution seems to affect certain course performance at the four-year level, however other influences like enrollment timing and academic preparation may require further inquiry.

While examining 100 community college transfer students at a four-year institution, Cejda (1997) found that transfer shock varied significantly by discipline, with liberal arts-related

majors achieving increased grades during the first semester after transfer, while science and math-related majors experiencing declines. In a similar study, Cejda, Kaylor, and Rewey (1998), reinforced how some students in particular disciplines may experience a phenomenon known as "transfer ecstasy," or an elation of grades after transfer, though those in math and science experience transfer shock (p. 7). Carlan and Byxbe's study (2000) also found that the college and major could predict which students would have more academic difficulty, though other variables including: gender, associate degree attainment, enrollment status, number of hours transferred in, and majoring in the arts did not impact GPA's of students at the upper level. Though all of the studies above indicate that major or discipline can affect a student's GPA either negatively or positively post-transfer, Carlan and Byxbe (2000) and Cejda (1997) all suggest further research concerning discipline-based analyses of transfer shock is needed.

Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso (2011) used propensity score matching methods in their study to compare students of similar characteristics, rather than looking at academic attainment. Some of the study's variables included participants' gender, ethnicity, pre-college achievement such as participation in an honors program or student government in high school, as well as financial aid and tuition costs. The study's findings indicate that transfer students had slightly lower graduation rates, however when using the propensity score matching, the rates of baccalaureate attainment between transfer and native students were similar. Comparing students with similar backgrounds, transfer student success is nearly as high as a native students'. Overall, transfer student graduation rates were slightly lower, which may indicate that a higher level of at-risk students may start at a community college rather than a four-year university, which is consistent with the national data (Shapiro, Dundar, Chen, Ziskin, Park, Torres, & Chiang, 2012). However, Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso (2011) noted that many students who may be

considered at risk due to low socioeconomic status or ethnic background never transfer into a four-year university, meaning some of the variables they wished to study were not possessed by those who transferred. Deeper understanding of characteristics of students who do and don't choose to transfer and how it can factor into GPA is needed to solidify claims concerning how student characteristics can affect GPA as students transfer vertically.

Additionally, Dennis, Calvillo, and Gonzalez (2008) determined that the most academically at-risk community college transfer students were young, academically underprepared students who had achieved low community college grade point averages prior to transfer. These students experienced transfer shock during their first semester at the four-year university, despite high to average levels of peer support, commitment to college, motivation, and self-efficacy. Students in this group were less likely to persist at the university than other groups, indicating an inability to recover from the initial transfer shock (Dennis, Calvillo, & Gonzalez, 2008). Their results suggest that academic preparation outweighs other factors in avoiding a drop in grade point average after transfer.

Research is moving beyond the general idea that transfer can have a negative impact on student academic performance at the four-year institution and has become more focused on what factors are influencing transfer student transfer shock. Though research does not appear conclusive concerning specific causes of student transfer shock, researchers are attempting to identify demographic information and academic performance indicators that may impact transfer shock. The literature also indicates that the responsibility of promoting transfer student academic success does not lie solely with one of the two institutions, but rather both institutions must collaboratively work to assess and respond to transfer student academic needs. Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso (2011) argue that "community colleges have the responsibility to provide the

academic preparation and transfer curriculum necessary for students to transfer on time, and four-year colleges should work with the students during the transition phase to make the process smoother" (p. 282). Successful academic transitions are vital for transfer students. The next section will address equally as important student transfer transition concepts that lie outside the academic realm.

Non-academic transition

Though researchers have examined community college student academic transfer shock at the four-year institution, there is also an expanded focus on non-academic factors related to the transition process. Research suggests that transfer students not only experience more academic turbulence, but also more social integration challenges than students who do not transfer (Townsend, 2008). Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso affirm (2011) that higher education staff should be concerned with transfer student success far beyond the grade point average and create processes to streamline the transfer transition phase. Understanding the comprehensive issues faced by transfer students is vital to improving strategies that may impact transfer student success.

Moving from a two- to a four- year institution requires community college students to make many types of adjustment inherent to a new setting. Students may experience what has been referred to as transitional trauma - the level of alienation a student experiences when unfamiliar with some of the norms, values and expectations at the four- year institution (Bennett and Okinaka 1990, 39). As community colleges typically focus on student-centered learning and a more personal environment, transfer students may perform academically well at the community college, but they may not be prepared to transition socially and psychologically to a four-year institutional environment (Laanan, 2001).

Transfer Student Capital

Researchers have worked to understand and measure the academic difficulty that students face as they transition from a two- to a four-year institution. Laanan (2001) acknowledged that understanding and measuring additional non-academic difficulty that students face as they transition from a two- to a four-year institution was equally important. Laanan (2001) also acknowledged that research examining the factors that contribute to post-transfer adjustment was very limited and worked to developed the concept of transfer student capital, which stemmed from Hills' (1965) research on "transfer shock." "Transfer student capital" refers to the experiences and learned skills that assist students to successfully navigate the process of transferring from a community college to a four-year school as well as positively influence transfer students' academic and social adjustment. Investigations into how both two and four-year schools assist students in ameliorating transfer shock led to the creation of Laanan's concept of "transfer student capital" (Laanan, Starobin, & Eggleston, 2011).

Laanan (2001) found three major themes in the literature concerning the adjustments a successful student makes during the transition to a four-year school. The three themes he identified were psychological adjustment, adjustment to a new educational environment, and adjustments to a different campus climate. Using the themes from the literature, Laanan developed the Laanan Transfer Student Questionnaire (L-TSQ), a 133-item, four-section instrument which asks students about their background characteristics, experiences at the community college, and experiences at their new institution (Laanan, 1998, 2004). Laanan (2001) claimed that because transfer student capital is intangible, it can be difficult to quantify, but the level of student accumulation is measurable. Laanan hypothesized that the more transfer

student capital a student accumulates, the more likely they are to resist transfer shock and successfully transition and persist to graduation.

Laanan's data (1998, 2004) indicated that increased levels of transfer student capital yielded an improvement in academic performance and adjustment and an increased resistance to transfer shock by students once they moved to the four-year institution. Thus, if an institution can provide both curricular and co-curricular support, students who take advantage of such services should increase their level of transfer student capital, therefore improving the odds of resisting "transfer shock" while navigating the transfer process (Laanan, Starobin, & Eggleston, 2011).

Moser (2013) reexamined and updated the transfer capital model developed by Laanan, Starobin, and Eggleston (2011) by identifying several new transfer student capital factors that predicted transfer success. These included collaboration with faculty at the community college, faculty contact at the community college, student motivation and self-efficacy, financial knowledge, etc. Moser (2013) found that the accumulation of transfer capital while at a two-year college is essential for students to make a successful transition to a four-year university. The contemporary addition of socio-emotional and cognitive measures and outcomes in addition to more commonly used outcome measures such as student GPA, document that factors contributing to successful transfer transitioning are numerous and complex, but reinforce the idea that higher levels of transfer student capital are indicative of smoother student transitioning. Though Laanan, Starobin, and Eggleston and Moser have all made major contributions to the literature concerning non-academic factors impacting transfer student transitions, the replication of their studies for longitudinal inquiry and the use of their studies in specific institutional

settings are needed to contribute to a deeper understanding of factors impacting transfer student transitioning.

Social Integration

For nearly 30 years, researchers and practitioners have stressed how successful social integration impacts student success. In his 1984 theory on student involvement, Astin (1999) pointed out several student indicators that play a strong role in student persistence which include: place of residence, involvement in honors programs, student-faculty interactions, academic involvement, athletic involvement, and involvement in student government. Nora and Rendon (1990) studied factors that predispose community college students to transfer and found that students with high levels of social and academic integration at the community college were more inclined to transfer to a four-year institution. Their research indicates that the development of effective policies and strategies to enhance academic and social integration are important prior to and after transfer. Similarly, Tinto (1998) pointed out that academic persistence is based on how involved students are with their academics as well as how socially involved they are with both staff and students. Students who are not engaged are likely to drop out. The earliest studies concerning the effects of social integration on successful transfer indicate that academic involvement, coupled with strong social involvement, are vital pieces to a student's overall successful transfer.

The research above helped inform how social integration can affect student transfer success. Though Nora and Rendon's (1990) research specifically focuses on how social and academic integration affect community college student transfer, the work of Tinto (1998) and Astin (1999) has been heavily critiqued for use and applicability with community college students (Ozaki,& Spaid, 2016). Astin (1999) and Tinto (1998) developed and normed their work

using students at four-year institutions, meaning their models and theories for understanding the experiences of students at two-year institutions may be problematic (Ashar & Skenes, 1993). Because Astin (1999) and Tinto's (1998) theories do not specifically address the issues that community college students face, additional research in how social integration may affect student transfer may need to be rethought using different models specific to community college and vertical transfer students.

Yet in 2006, Flaga affirmed that much of the literature concerning student transfer transitions emphasized transfer shock and that there was still a void in the research concerning the social integration of community college students. Researchers who have taken broader approaches to include social transition of community college students include Flaga (2006), Laanan (1996, 2007), Townsend and Wilson (2006), Woosley and Johnson, (2006) and Ishitani and McKitrick (2010). Social interactions may include both formal or institutionally provided co-curricular activities and informal inter-actions with peers (Townsend, 2006). Going to class without socially engaging in campus weakens students' chance for success. Establishing friendships, developing mentors and forming connections to faculty members have been identified as important factors for student integration (Swail, 2004). Socially integrating into a campus community is a cumulative process (Swail, 2004), therefore it is vital for students to establish social connections at their campus early in their academic experience.

While interviewing community college transfer students to a large, public research university, Townsend and Wilson (2009) revealed that involvement in major-related groups, undergraduate research with professors, and institutional size were most important in students' academic and social integration and subsequent persistence at the university. The community college transfer student participants found some aspects of the large university difficult

concerning social integration. They felt that the university catered to traditional-age students and to students who lived on or near the campus. Community college transfer students were also accustomed to the classroom as a site for social as well as academic engagement at the community college and found the anonymity of large lectures and the unwillingness of other students to form study groups frustrating. Students attributed increased academic demands, increased financial pressure, and commute requirements to their decline in social satisfaction. Berger and Malaney (2003) also found that students were most likely to be satisfied with of university life when they were actively engaged in social activities, specifically with peers. However, socializing with peers had a negative effect on grades, but no other measures of university involvement were significantly related to academic outcomes.

The research concerning social integration and engagement indicate that it is not only a key factor in successful transfer, but also that some transfer students may need assistance engaging in and advising about how best approach and how to handle the balancing of academics and social life on a four-year campus. While increased levels of social engagement are positively related to persistence, this is not the case if students find themselves in academic distress or trying to balance other non-academic demands. Institutions should consider campus engagement strategies as an integral part of both community college and four-year institutions to promote transfer success. Furthermore, pinpointing students' efforts to integrate themselves socially both before and after transfer may assist campuses in how to approach strategies to do so. Researchers have come to understand the academic and non-academic intricacies impacting student transfers and are now looking to ameliorate overall transfer success rates given the broad sweeping benefits of an educated population.

Transfer Success

Given the large portion of transfer students in the US and the complexities they can face during the transfer process, their successful transfer should be of concern to both community colleges and universities. A 2018 report shows that of the two- to four-year transfers, less than half (42.2 percent) complete a bachelor's degree within six years of starting at the community college (Shapiro, Dundar, Huie, Wakhungu, Bhimdiwali, Nathan, & Youngsik, 2018). Not only should student completion rates drive institutions to improve transfer success, but they may also consider the broader sweeping positive economic and social impacts of a more educated population (Goldrick-Rab, & Roksa, 2008). Transfer students have often been ignored in retention efforts (Kuh et al., 2005), including basic activities such as campus orientation (Herman & Lewis, 2004).

Research clearly indicates the complex and various issues community college transfers experience during and after the transfer process, however the extent to which either two-year or four-year institutions have worked to rectify these problems is not clear (Chrystal, Gansemer-Topf, & Laanan, 2013). How researchers and institutions are working to understand all that encompasses transfer student success and the strategies created to rectify the issue are important not only to students and higher education, but much broader audiences, as well.

Student Perspectives Concerning Transfer Facilitation

Researchers have identified transfer challenges, such as transfer shock and the temporary drop in grade point average during the time of transfer transition for students via qualitative inquiry. However, expanded research has incorporated student perspectives concerning transfer challenges and possible solutions via qualitative inquiry. Townsend and Wilson (2006) conducted a qualitative study that revealed how institutional leaders could facilitate a more

seamless transfer for students beyond well-organized articulation agreements. After gathering transfer student perspectives, Townsend and Wilson (2006) suggested targeting improvements specific to transfer programming and services, ranging from the transfer process itself, transfer student orientation, to the academic and social integration of community college transfers once at the receiving institution. To assist transfer students' persistence and success, Townsend and Wilson (2006) suggest that institutional staff first acknowledge that transfers are a sizable portion of incoming students and to extend first year student-geared assistance to them even though they are not first year students.

Fee, Prolman, and Thomas (2009) conducted a similar qualitative study and identified six important findings to promote transfer student success. They stated that staff should incorporate organization and time management, connecting academics to students' lives, challenging work, small classes, and knowing professors into programs and assistance strategies. Their study revealed that time management is different for transfer students than native students given the non-traditional nature of transfer students, who typically focus on work and paying bills more than school (Fee, Prolman, & Thomas, 2009). Staff who address how to manage time are likely to see students build self-efficacy skills and continue at a four-year institution. Fee, Prolman, & Thomas (2009) also found that transfer students yearn to apply classroom knowledge and skills to real-world experiences. Staff who assist students connect coursework to real-world experiences may help students improve classroom experiences (Fee, Prolman, & Thomas, 2009). Students who can experience the utility of classwork may give more effort improving classroom success. Transfer students proved to want more challenging courses (Fee, Prolman, and Thomas, 2009). Succeeding in a challenging course can build self-confidence and promote persistence.

Additionally, transfer students wanted time to get to know their professors, establish close relationships with faculty and staff, as they look to those who can motivate and advise.

Ellis (2013) also conducted focus groups with transfer students to identify what successful students need to transfer. Two of the strongest participant-discussed skills were self-motivation and the ability to be persistent and seek answers to questions. Participants also discussed the institutional importance of strong advising, as many indicated that advising was poor at both the community college and university level. In response to poor advising, participants often relied on other sources of academic support such as websites and peer advisers (Ellis, 2013). Ellis's (2013) study implies that pertinent information and reliable methods of communication can aid students during the transition.

Research concerning student perspectives and transfer facilitation documents a wide variety of student viewpoints regarding what influences their transfer success. Reoccurring themes raised by students include strong connections with and advising from institutional staff and faculty as well as targeted programming for both academic and social transitioning. Along with the institutional desire to improve student transfer success, students' desire for institutional assistance and are able to distinguish when an institution is missing the mark.

Transition Programming

The Purpose of Transition Programming in Higher Education

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS; CAS, 2015) has been the preeminent force for promoting standards for higher education programs and services since its inception in 1979. Transfer Student Programs and Services is just one of CAS's 45 functional areas that serve as a resource for all types of transfer student programming. CAS (CAS, 2015) outlines various methods institutions can employ to facilitate transfer and improve

targeted transfer student programming. For example, CAS (2015) states, “effectively preparing students for planned and unplanned transitions between institutions; helping them anticipate areas where change is more likely to occur; and identifying early in the process their personal, academic, financial, and social goals as well as factors that may inhibit or facilitate success” (p. 440). Transition programming’s purpose is to aid in the successful transfer, persistence, and graduation of transfer students by facilitating seamless pathways among and within institutions to support transfer students at all stages of their transitions (CAS, 2015).

Transfer student programs

Many institutions have responded to documented transfer student transition difficulties and created targeted programming to foster student transfer. Melguizo, Kienzl, and Alfonso (2011) argued that “community colleges have the responsibility to provide the academic preparation and transfer curriculum necessary for students to transfer on time, and 4-year colleges should work with the students during the transition phase to make the process smoother” (p. 282). In contrast, Rhine, Milligan, and Nelson (2000) question how to work on improving the transition experience prior to arrival at the four-year institution. Rhine, Milligan, and Nelson (2000) state that community college staff must understand transfer student difficulties to improve transfer student services and outreach as well as understand the expectations and experiences that community college transfer students have entering a four-year institution. They claim that staff can then better assess areas of disconnect between the expectations and the realities of transitioning students. As researchers suggest various approaches to creating programming, existing transfer programs also vary in approach.

Process-Based Transfer Programming

Some transfer programming models focus on assisting transfer students through the transfer process. Typical transfer programming might assist students through admission and financial aid processes, as well as assist students in making connections at the transfer institution. For example, The Vital Connections Transfer Program assists students wishing to transfer from community colleges in Colorado and Wyoming to Colorado State University (CSU). The program provides transfer students benefits including "a streamlined application process; no application fee; and information regarding transfer events, scholarships and advising services" (Davies & Kratky, 2000). One year of courses at the community college level is required prior to application to strengthen a student's academic background and use of campus resources. Upon applying to CSU, students receive targeted communication pieces and are required to meet with a CSU adviser.

Using a focus group consisting of students who transferred to CSU, Davies and Kratky (2000) studied students' perception of the program's usefulness. Students agreed that the program was helpful. Improvements such as general university information, a thorough list of steps to complete the transfer process, a campus tour, a better understanding of class structure, and peer-mentoring were offered. Institutional transfer programs must be tailored to best suit specific institutional and student needs, however Davies and Kratky's (2000) research reveals the value and needed improvement to transfer specific programming specific to this institution. Though process-based transfer programming demystifies some process-based student transfer challenges, transfer students encounter other challenges that are better targeted through other models.

Academic-Based Transfer Programming

Other transfer programming models focus on assisting transfer students through the academic transitions of a transfer process. Typical academic focused programming might include transfer credit, advising and tutoring. The University of Southern California (USC) also collaborated with different community colleges to foster student transfer. A USC-developed theory-based tutoring model (Kisker, 2007) was the highlight of the program, though various other activities were involved. USC tutors worked to educate community college tutors on proven techniques. USC tutoring model included establishing study groups, tutorials, and outside classroom support. Over time, much of USC's method was incorporated, but was adjusted to meet the community college needs (Kisker, 2007). Additionally, faculty from both community colleges and 4-year institutions discussed curriculum and adaptations to "facilitate students' matriculation" (Kisker, 2007, p. 288).

Community college faculty were hesitant to move beyond course instruction, though some acknowledged that there were ways they could facilitate the transfer process (Kisker, 2007). As over half of community college faculty members are part-time employees (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013), some hesitation may be warranted. The study revealed increased transfer rates from participating community colleges to USC, administrator perception that more students were considering a four-year institution, and administrators' perceptions of invigorated faculty when working with transfer students. Though the primary focus of this study differs from that of CSU's mentioned above, it shows how institutions can recognize gaps and create solutions via targeted programming specific to their students' needs.

Academic and Social-Based Transfer Programming

Another type of transfer programming model focuses on assisting transfer students

through the academic, as well as the social transitions of a transfer process. Academic and social-based transfer programming not only combines tactics to address the possible academic challenges students face, but also provides social programming for students to better connect within their new community. The University of North Carolina at Chapel (UNC-CH) created a program to respond to the needs of North Carolina-based community college students. Based on Tito's Student Integration Model (1975, 1993), UNC-CH developed the Transfer United program to assist junior transfer student transition and persistence. The Transfer United program was designed to mitigate transfer shock and support student's social and academic adjustment (Fisher, Demetriou, & Hall, 2013). Based on academic and social transition research (Tinto 1975; Laanan 2001), the Transfer United program encompasses academics, wellness, and engagement to promote student adjustment and success. The program's curriculum-based approach encompasses learning outcomes, intentional academic and social experiences, and high impact educational practices. Helping transfer students connect to the university and their undergraduate experience and persist to graduation at UNC-CH is the program's vision.

Dual Admission-Based Transfer Programming

Transfer programming models that focus on dual admission typically prepare students to transfer from a specific community college(s) to a particular four-year institution and reduce specific barriers between the two institutions. While other models may need to consider students originating from a wide variety of colleges, dual admission programming usually focuses on certain institutions, typically guaranteeing admission to the four-year institution for students who successfully work through the program. The Dual Admission Program (DAP) at Florida International University (FIU) and the MAPP program at Maricopa Community College and Arizona State University. The DAP program at FIU guarantees admissions to those deemed

initially admissible if they participate in the program. The program includes community college meet-and-greets, group advising sessions during the program, and final meetings with FIU advisers as their transition to FIU is planned. Required completion of an associate's degree within three years has been identified as a challenge, however a clear bachelor's degree pathway and a perceived improvement in faculty assistance with student transition have been among the program's positive impacts (Valdes, Albury, Mahmood, & Merine, 2012). Similarly, the Arizona-based MAPP program also guarantees admission to a four-year institution, but was also created to improve students' transfer experience by increasing financial support, provide training opportunities for student advisers, create data sharing opportunities for student monitoring, as well as an electronic transfer system (Harper-Marinick & Swarthout, 2012, p.83). MAPP participants receive guaranteed admission to Arizona State University upon completion of the program, along with other student benefits.

The above programs exemplify how institutions have created unique programming to respond to the research and documented needs of vertical transfer students. Specialized transfer student programming considers not only students' needs, but often those specific to the participating institutions or regions. Considering the vast research concerning vertical transfer students and existing programming created to remedy known issues, the conceptual framework of this study looks to incorporate aspects of quality improvement into the implementation and improvement of vertical transfer programming.

Conceptual Framework

Many studies concerning vertical transfer students have focused on the students' transition process. Various theories and frameworks have been employed to understand transfer and transition processes. For example, Rendón (2002) employed her validation theory to explore

academic and interpersonal validation elements in relation to educational access for Latino students. Rendón defines validation as "an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development" (Rendón, 1994, p. 44). Her study documented that Latino and nontraditional students require active and sustained intervention to ensure persistence. More specific to transfer students' social transition during vertical transfer, Astin's (1985) theory of Student Involvement describes the importance of student involvement in college and has been used to explain how students change and develop as result to being co-curricularly involved. Wang (2009) employed Astin's theory of Student Involvement in her research concerning persistence of community college transfer students at four-year institutions. The theories above have been employed to review how academic and social transfer assistance affect student transfer outcomes. Other theories, however, have been employed to explore student transfer from alternate frames.

Theories concerning student background characteristics and experiences have been employed to explore student transfer. Theories of Persistence like Bean and Metzner's (1985) Attrition Model and Tinto's (1993) Theory of Student Departure highlight the importance of student background characteristics and on-campus experiences, however each stem from a different theoretical basis. Bean and Metzner (1985) developed the Attrition Model to understand the reasons for nontraditional undergraduate student dropout. Researchers like Laanan (2001) have used the model to investigate transfer student adjustment. Additionally, Tinto's (1993) theory of Student Departure has been used in a variety of college settings to develop freshman interest groups as a method of improving student persistence (Upcraft & Gardiner, 1989).

Smedley, Myers, and Harrell (1993) developed the Stress-Coping Model to help better understand how stress impacts student adjustment. Laanan (2001) also employed this model

during his investigation into transfer student adjustment. Though first developed as a counseling theory, Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984, 1995) has been employed by researchers like Patton and Davis (2014) to model how students move in, through and out of transitions.

Existing literature has employed various theories and frameworks to thoroughly explore the student perspective regarding vertical transfer, as well as the requirements for successful transfer. From such work, institutions craft transfer programming. Institutions have responded to the needs of vertical transfer students through targeted programming, however transfer rates and persistence to baccalaureate degree completion remain underwhelming. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center 2016 Signature Report on completion rates found that only 30% of the fall 2010 entering cohort of community college students completed their first credential within six years at either the initial institution where they were enrolled or at a different two-year college. Another 9.3% completed their first credential at a four-year institution. Given the argument that faster progress towards a credential make college completion more likely for students (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009) and the call for shorter completion timelines (Complete College America, 2011), it is time for institutions to look to improve transfer programming drive student transfer and completion success.

Though institutions have created various types of transfer student programming, to combat documented student challenges, existing literature and theories have not yet explored how institutions have worked to improve current transfer programming. The statistical evidence of low completion rates of community college transfer students above is a call to look deeper into how transfer student programming is not only created, but also improved to create positive student impact. The Deming PDSA (Plan-Do-Study-Act) Cycle (The W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017) will be explained in the next section to provide a framework as to how

institutions may consider improving existing models.

The Deming PDSA Cycle

The Deming PDSA Cycle (Plan-Do-Study-Act) is a systematic process for gaining valuable knowledge of the continual improvement of a product, process, or service (The W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017). Deming built the method from many problem-solving theories, including Shewhart's theory titled Statistical Method from the Viewpoint of Quality Control (The W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017). In the 1950's, Deming began using his scientific method in industry settings and later titled the method the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) Cycle (Moen &Norman, 2010).

The Plan step begins the Deming's PDSA Cycle. The Plan step involves identifying a goal or purpose, formulating a theory, and defining success metrics and putting a plan into action. Next, during the Do step, the components of the plan are implemented. During the Study step, outcomes are monitored to test for signs of progress, success, problems or areas of improvement. Lastly, the Act step closes the cycle. Learning generated by the process is used to adjust goals, modify methods, or formulate new theories. These four steps can be continuously repeated as part of a never-ending cycle of continual learning and improvement.

PDSA Cycle and Model for Improvement
Model for Improvement
What are we trying to accomplish? ⇓
How will we know that a change is important? ⇓
What change can we make that will result in improvement? ⇓

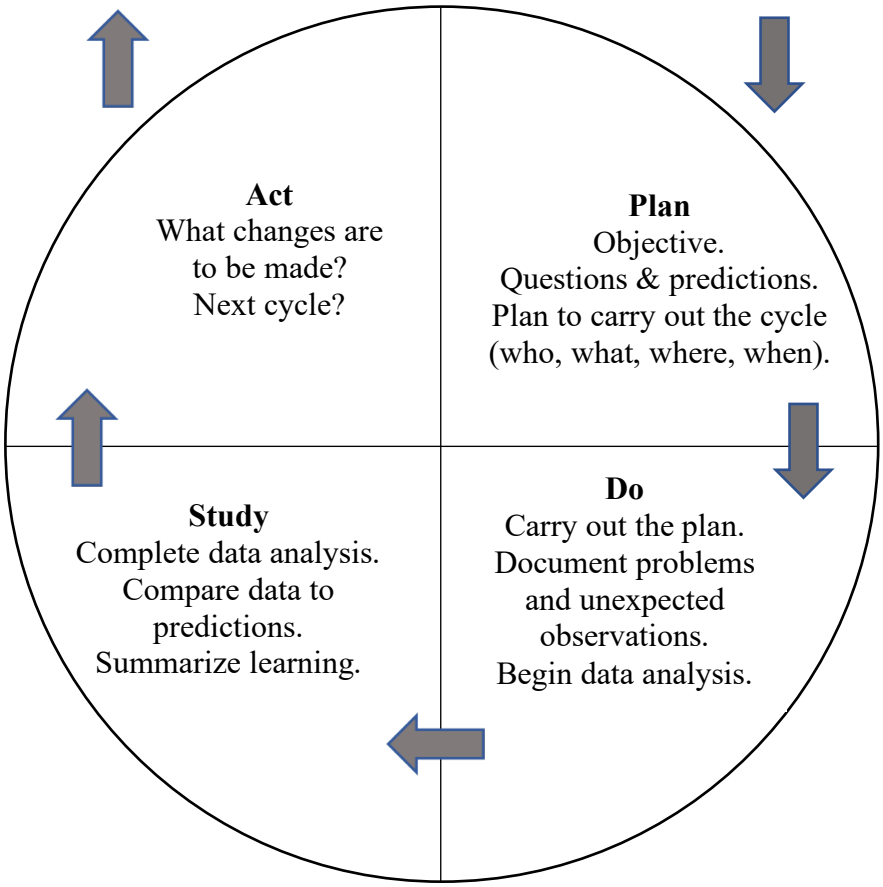

Figure 1. PDSA Cycle and Model for Improvement. (Langley, Nolan, & Nolan & 1994)

Higher education has not been immune to business-related concepts and practices. Reddy (2012, p. 589) states that there is a growing acceptance of students as consumers within the context of higher education. As a service industry, higher education must focus on students' needs and expectations to be successful (DeShields et al., 2005). Student satisfaction is important regarding their experiences in higher education given the rapid growth and the competitive nature of the educational market (Elliot & Healy, 2001). The use of Deming's PDSA Cycle, (The

W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017) though initially employed as a business-focused model, seems reasonable for this study given the current challenges and expectations in higher education as well as the fact it has been reviewed for usefulness in higher education (Rinehart, 1993).

Bonser (1992) made a strong case for employing Deming's philosophy in higher education as it can guide institutions and their leadership. Unlike some theories or models, Edwards Deming's concepts of quality and improvement embody a philosophy of action, a way of facilitating necessary improvement (Holt, 1993). More recent research has also called upon the incorporation of business models to be used as solution finding mechanisms in higher education. Magaud (2011) and Magaud and Krone (2012) explain how current institutional challenges such as increasing operating costs, declining tuition, stricter regulations, and calls for increased productivity are demanding innovative institutional responses. Using models that originate from outside of higher education may be one way to innovatively review processes within higher education. Magaud and Krone (2012) explain that administrators have become fluent in managing crises, in instituting quick fixes and in providing simple, short-term solutions to problems; non-traditional ways to manage higher education are needed. Magaud (2011) acknowledges that higher education has struggled to improve quality and adopt a continuous quality philosophy and reiterates the need for innovation and collaboration to work toward goals.

As stated above, several types programming have been created to address the challenges that transfer students encounter. This study's purpose is to understand how institutions are creating and improving transfer programming and focuses on institutional improvement processes regarding transfer programming. No studies have used Deming's PDSA Cycle (The W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017) to understand and evaluate the implementation and improvement of an institution's transfer programming. Additionally, employing a framework

that was created outside of higher education may provide new perspective to the review process. Deming's PDSA Cycle was be used as a framework to investigate how institutions are implementing and improving to transfer programming.

Conclusion

Research on the mobility of community college students has focused almost exclusively on the study of vertical transfer (Doyle 2009). The intense research attention focused toward vertical transfer exists specifically because it is a critical step on the road to a baccalaureate degree (Bahr, 2012; Long & Kurlaender; 2009). Vertical transfer-related research has generally focused on challenges students encounter as they transfer between two-year and four-year institutions. However, little research has focused on the actual mechanism of the transfer process between the two venues and the efficiency and efficacy of that process (Gard, Paton, & Gosselin, 2012). Examining institutional responses and ways in which they can encourage students to advance along the road to transfer remains an important area for research (Roska & Calcagno, 2010, p.267).

Institutions have responded to the needs of vertical transfer students through targeted programming, however transfer rates and persistence to baccalaureate degree completion remain underwhelming. Given the call for improved student completion it is time for institutions to look to improve transfer programming for the purpose of overall student success. Deming's PDSA Cycle (The W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017) was be used as a framework to investigate how institutions are and implementing possible improvement to transfer programming. Employing a framework that was created outside of higher education may provide new perspective to reviewing a vertical transfer program.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to understand and analyze the creation and improvement of vertical transfer student programming through the lens of Deming's Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle (The W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017). This study sought to better understand how vertical transfer programming addresses vertical transfer student transition challenges by investigating the creation and improvement of a vertical transfer student program between a public, two-year career and technical college and a large, public, four-year research university (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education by Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research, 2018) in the Midwest region of the United States.

To begin this chapter, I explain the research questions, the research approach, and the research design. The second portion of this chapter focuses on the site selection, participants, and data collection strategies. The last section focuses on trustworthiness methods, data management, data analysis and limitations of my study.

Research Question

The research was guided by one primary research question: How does a public, two-year college and a large, public, four-year research university in the Midwest region of the United States create and improve vertical transfer student programming to prepare students for vertical transfer transitions?

Research Approach

"Quantitative research methods attempt to maximize objectivity, replicability, and generalizability of findings, and are typically interested in prediction" (Harwell, 2011, p.149), whereas qualitative research methods focus on discovering and understanding the experiences, perspectives, and thoughts of participants and exploring meaning, purpose, or reality (Hiatt, 1986). While quantitative and qualitative research share commonalities, they also differ in ways that might make one research approach more appropriate than the other in varying circumstances.

Creswell (2007) provides his definition of qualitative investigation:

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action. (p. 37)

Qualitative research plays an important role in the process of scholarly discovery. Qualitative research usually falls within the context of discovery rather than verification (Ambert et al., 1995). Qualitative researchers seek to acquire comprehensive and intimate information about a smaller group of persons instead of drawing from a large, representative sample of an entire population of interest. Studying things in their natural setting allows qualitative

researchers to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Mertens, 2005). Qualitative researchers strive to learn about how and why people behave, think, and make meaning as they do, rather than what they do on a large scale. Creswell (2007) states that a reason, in addition to those listed above, to choose qualitative research methodologies over quantitative, is "because quantitative measures and the statistical analyses simply do not *fit* the problem" (p. 40).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) indicate that qualitative research is best used when the methods are (a) complementary to the preferences and personal experiences of the researcher, (b) congruent with the nature of the research problem, and (c) employed to explore areas about which little is known. Cuevas, Dinero, and Feit (1996) state that qualitative data is useful in helping to learn why similarly designed programs or processes may work in one environment but not in another; or in recognizing factors that are difficult to validate when making generalizations. Qualitative data can often reveal factors which are unique to a particular setting or community.

A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study as I was interested in how a public, two-year college and a large, public, four-year research university create and improve a vertical transfer student programming. Because I was interested in their planning, programming, improvement and experiences, I sought to uncover institutional voices and perspectives. I wanted to understand, from the participants' perspective, what aspects were important in preparing students for vertical transfer transition and how they have worked to address that via formal programming. I wanted to learn about this complex process within its natural context. Ultimately, my goal was for this study to be a first step toward understanding intentional programming for the transfer student population to provide resources to similar institutions.

Creswell (2007) expressed that a “good” qualitative study includes (a) rigorous data collection, data analysis, and report writing; (b) frames the study within the assumptions and characteristics; (c) begins with a single focus; (d) writes persuasively so that the reader experiences “being there;” (e) reflects the history, culture, and personal experiences of the researcher; and, (f) demonstrates the qualitative research is a good, ethical study. A qualitative methodology provided me with an array of tools me to gather and analyze the data needed to formulate reliable responses to my research question. The responses I sought pertained specifically to institutional processes and the perspectives of institutional stakeholders regarding the creation and improvement of vertical transfer student programming.

Research Design

Researchers approach a topic with a particular methodology because the methodology lends itself best to the overall purpose of study. I selected a descriptive case study approach to best investigate and respond to my research question.

Framework

Certain situations create relevant opportunities for applying a case study research method. First, the choices among different research methods, including the case study method, can be determined by the kind of research question that a study is trying to address (Shavelson & Towne, 2002). Case studies are a preferred strategy when "how” or "why" type of questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context (Yin, 1981, 2003). Given that I was interested in understanding the detailed creation and improvement process of the vertical transfer program from stakeholders’ point of view, a case study method was especially applicable.

In case study research, according to Creswell (2007), the investigator explores a bounded system (a case), or multiple bounded systems (cases), over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based-themes. Case study research originates from the compelling desire to derive an up-close or otherwise in-depth understanding of a single or small number of "cases" set in their real-world contexts (Bromley, 1986, p. 1). The case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic, meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2003). A case study suited this study best as I sought to uncover the authentic perspectives of the stakeholders working directly in the institutional setting of the vertical transfer program.

This research studied a bound case between two institutions as a means to deeply investigate their processes surrounding their transfer program. This study sought to answer the how and why questions concerning the creation and improvement of a vertical transfer program and also sought to understand the phenomena and real-life student issues the program addressed. A case study allowed for the holistic examination of the phenomena within the context of the specific vertical transfer program and the two selected institutions in their natural context.

Descriptive Case Study

The selection of a specific type of case study design is guided by the overall purpose of study. A descriptive case study methodology was used to conduct this research. Yin (1981) notes that a descriptive case study strives to document the procedures of a particular event or events. Stenhouse (1988) states that this is an appropriate measure to employ when the researcher is working "to enrich the thinking and discourse of educators either by the development of educational theory or by the refinement of prudence through the systematic and reflective

documentation of experience" (p. 50).

I chose to frame and analyze my research findings in terms of a single, descriptive case study. I chose a descriptive case study to elicit certain types of data within a certain context, as listed above. I chose to frame this study in this manner primarily for the reason that the literature describes various types of vertical transfer programs. Because few vertical transfer programs are the same, I felt it necessary to understand the creation and improvement processes of one vertical transfer program instead of attempting to capture quantitative data from programs of varying type and goal. Seeking in-depth understanding of the creation and improvement processes of one program, may help understand the creation and improvement processes of other similar programs.

Methodological Limitations

A common pitfall associated with case study is the tendency for researchers to attempt to answer a question that is too broad or a topic that has too many objectives for one study. Authors, including Yin (2003) and Stake (1995), have suggested placing boundaries on a case to prevent this issue. Case study boundaries indicate the scope, breadth, and depth of the research project. Suggestions on how to bind a case include: (a) by time and place (Creswell, 2003); (b) time and activity (Stake); and (c) by definition and context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Binding the case ensures that a study remains reasonable in scope. To appropriately bind the study, I examined one vertical transfer program between a public, two-year college and a large, public, four-year research university. I investigated how and why the institutions chose to prepare students for vertical transfer in the manner that they do. I examined the environment, documents, and the experiences of staff and faculty who have sought to improve or participated in the programming. As I sought participants for this study, I looked to gain perspective

concerning all four areas of Deming's Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle (The W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017). I sought to understand perspectives from those who have created or make decisions about the process, who are engaged from a staff, faculty or student perspective and how each participant is involved in its improvement.

Critics are commonly concerned that a case study provides little basis for scientific generalization (Yin, 2003, p.10). Yin (2003) responds by stating to this: "case studies […] are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In this sense, the case study […] does not represent a 'sample', and in doing a case study, your goal will be to generalize theories (analytical generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)" (p.10). Yin (2003) contends that the benefits can be maximized if three principles are followed: use of multiple sources of evidence, creation of a case study database, and maintaining a chain of evidence (p.83, 97-105).

Data Sources

In case studies, causal relationships are established by inferences based on interviews or documented evidence from the selected units of study (Gerring, 2001). A researcher must explore rival explanations and determine the convergence or divergence of data from multiple sources in terms of supporting or not supporting research claims (Mertens, 2005). A hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources; a strategy that enhances data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003). Data from multiple sources are converged in the analysis process rather than handled individually. Each data source is one piece of the "puzzle," with each piece contributing to the researcher's understanding of the whole phenomenon. This convergence adds strength to the findings as the various strands of data are combined to promote a greater understanding of the case. Unique in comparison to other qualitative approaches, the collection

and integration quantitative data facilitates reaching a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied. I incorporated multiple data collection methods beyond stakeholder interview to provide a rich investigation of the vertical transfer program. I used each data collection method to address the research question.

Finally, Yin (2003) recommends conducting a pilot case study as a final preparation for data collection. This step can help to refine the data collection plans with respect to both the content of the data and the procedures to be followed. The following sections of this chapter addresses scientific concerns related to case studies as outlined by Yin.

Methods

The next section details a precise description of how the research was conducted and provides rationale for chosen procedures. I outline site and participant selection, data collection strategies, data analysis, validity and data management.

Program Selection

A vertical transfer program existing between a Carnegie designated public, two-year college and a large, public, four-year research university located in the upper Midwest was chosen for this research. The program was selected for various reasons. First, the program's primary goal is to prepare students for successful transition to the bachelor's level institution. The chosen community college's primary focus is to offer associate-level, or 100 and 200 level, courses and programs to prepare students for transfer. Additionally, the formal transition program is intended for students who have selected a transfer-focused academic program. Finally, the program is accessible to the researcher and is one of the only formalized transfer programs in the state.

Program Description

The Caxin Community College (CCC) and Willis State University (WSU) Joint Transition Program was selected as the vertical transfer program for this study. The real institutional names have been replaced with pseudonyms. No identification with actual institutions or locations is intended or should be inferred. Any association with affiliates or likeness is incidental. The Joint Transition Program is a collaborative program between the two institutions that prepares students for the academic rigors of college-level course work at a research institution (Caxin Community College, 2018).

The Joint Transition Program is a collaborative program between Caxin Community College (CCC) and Willis State University (WSU) that began in 2008. The Joint Transition Program aims to prepare Willis State University applicants who are not admitted for eventual transfer to Willis State University after completing developmental and general education coursework at Caxin Community College. Applicants who are not admitted to WSU may be selected to participate in the Joint Transition Program. Joint Transition Program students enroll in development courses, which are commonly referred to as remedial courses, and other general education courses at CCC and a limited number of general education courses at WSU.

In 2008, Caxin Community College and Willis State University created a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that both institutional presidents signed. The MOU outlines the Joint Transition Program's mission, guiding principles, and general components of collaboration. Joint Transition Program staff have developed several other procedural and informational documents concerning the program such as a Joint Transition Program Handbook which outlines all procedural details of the program ranging from institutional and staff responsibilities, admission

flow charts, to the organization of registration days. Other documents include promotional and communication documents for students, intent to participate forms, and registration forms.

"Applicants who are not admitted to WSU may be eligible to participate in the Joint Transition Program" (Caxin Community College, 2018). If full admission to WSU is denied based upon ACT sub-scores by the University Admission Committee, the Joint Transition Program could be recommended. If a student is chosen for the Joint Transition Program, an admission decision letter, along with a Pathway Intent Form and informational brochure is mailed to the student.

Students in the Joint Transition Program are required to attend an orientation and registration session, which includes Pathway student expectations, advisement, registration for courses and an introduction to WSU residence life and student services. Pathway students are able to access services at both WSU and CCC, including but not limited to both campus libraries, tutoring services and counseling resources. Pathway students can participate in student organizations and attend campus athletic events, fine arts events, etc. "Pathway students enroll in academic readiness courses and general education courses at the CCC campus, located adjacent to the WSU campus, and a limited number of general education courses at WSU" (Caxin Community College, 2018). Academic readiness courses at CCC prepare students for the course work required to earn a bachelor's degree from WSU.

The developmental courses are designed to prepare students for the more rigorous course work required to earn a degree from WSU. The typical student will satisfactorily complete two or three semesters of course work, including any development courses, as well as a minimum of 24 transferrable college credits with a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher at both WSU and CCC prior to transitioning fully to WSU. Additionally, students are eligible to live on WSU's campus

and engage in student life and student support opportunities at both institutions while in the program. Upon successful completion of the Joint Transition Program requirements, students transfer to WSU. Transfer students are typically ineligible for Pathway. The Joint Transition Program Flow Chart shown in Figure 2 outlines principal steps students encounter as the student in the Joint Transition Program.

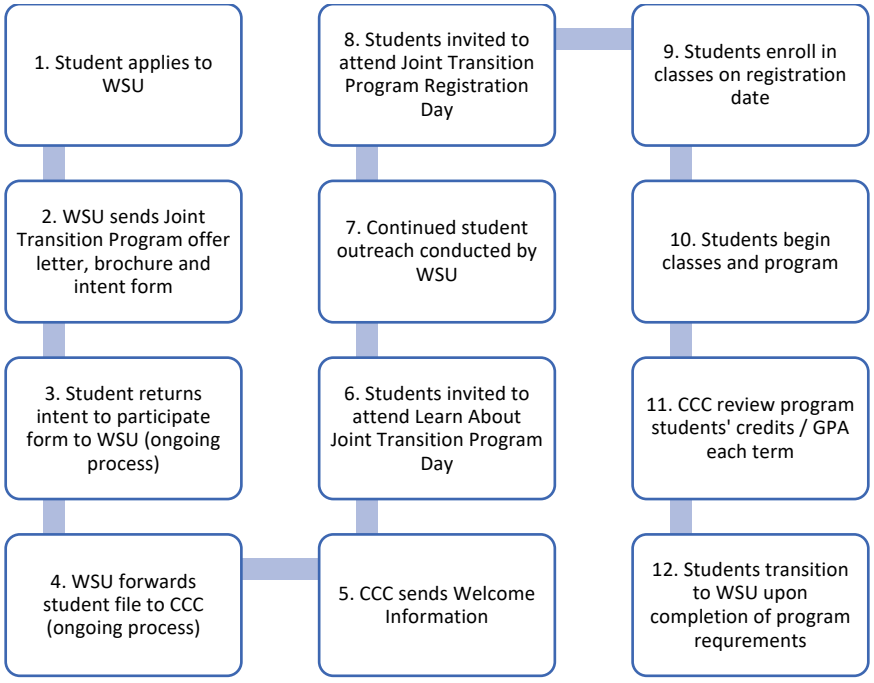

Figure 2. Joint Transition Program Flow Chart.

Site Description

Caxin Community College and Willis State University are located one block apart in Forest City, which has a population of about 125,000 people. The Forest City metropolitan area population is estimated at about 245,000 people. The Forest City metropolitan area is home to one large research university, one state university, one private university and three two-year institutions.

Caxin Community College. Caxin Community College (CCC) is one of eleven public

institutions governed by the State Board of Higher Education which oversees the unified system of higher education institutions known and referred to as the University System (US; University System, 2018). CCC is a public, high vocational and technical two-year institution that provides comprehensive educational programming to about 3,000 students (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions, 2017).

Founded in 1903, CCC is one of the oldest two-year, comprehensive, residential colleges in the nation. CCC offers degrees, certificates and diplomas in traditional career and technical studies as well as the liberal arts. CCC is fully accredited as an institution by the Higher Learning Commission (Caxin Community College, 2018). The main campus is located in Grove City and a second location, CCC-Forest City, is located in Forest City. The Joint Transition Program is offered exclusively at the CCC-Forest City location (Caxin Community College, 2018).

Willis State University. Willis State University (WSU) is also one of eleven public institutions governed by the Board of Higher Education which oversees the unified system of higher education institutions known and referred to as the University System (University System, 2018). WSU is a public, selective, high-research activity, doctoral institution that provides comprehensive educational programming to about 14,500 students (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions, 2017).

WSU is listed in the National Science Foundation's top 100 in several areas, including agricultural sciences, social sciences, physical sciences, chemistry, psychology and computer sciences. WSU is fully accredited as an institution by the Higher Learning Commission and its main campus is located in Forest City, with Extension Service and Research Experiment Stations locations across the state (Willis State University, 2018).

Pilot Study

Lapan (2004) states that "testing the instruments in the field is essential to their readiness for use" (p. 241). He further explains that such activities allow the beginning researcher the opportunity to practice conducting interviews. Interview protocols were pilot tested with an Academic Records professional who has over ten years' experience with student transfer in the same state as the two institutions in this study. I pilot tested interview questions to gain feedback concerning interview questions, language, order, protocol, etc. Feedback was solicited to aid revisions to assure the protocol was ready for use.

As a result of the pilot test, I learned that my questions were simply stated and easy to understand. I edited few words and structures but rearranged sequence a bit to encourage flow. The pilot allowed me to test clarifying statement or additional prompts if a participate had difficulty understanding or understanding how to answer. Little changed as a result of the study; however, it reassured my questions, the verbiage used, and the sequencing. Once the pilot testing was completed and suggested updates were made, the protocols were deemed ready to be used for interviews.

Participants

Participant Selection. Institutional leaders (e.g., Vice Presidents, Department Chairs, Directors) were requested to assist in selecting representative interviewees who undertake work or participation with vertical transfer student programming within the identified institutions. Institutional leaders were asked to take a participative approach to determining interviewees by focusing on the potential input and collaboration from those who make decisions, implement and participate in or have participated in vertical transfer student programming. The goal was to select participants undertake decision-making, implementation, participation and improvement

with vertical transfer student programming. No incentives were provided for the subjects I interviewed or observed.

The participants I chose to observe and interview included individuals with administrative responsibility, academic administrators, student affairs administrators, as well as staff associated with vertical transfer programming. I interviewed other individuals as recommended or as the case study progressed.

I gathered interview data from staff and administrators who were associated with vertical transfer student programming. Time constraints did not allow interviews with every nominated individual associated with vertical transfer initiatives. I focused data collection using participants who are most directly involved with the vertical transfer programming as determined by the respective institutional leaders.

Participant Recruitment. Administrative contacts from each participating institution were asked to assist in the identification of interview participants. Administrative contacts were asked to provide a list of names and contact information of potential interview candidates. I emailed potential interview candidates as outlined in Appendix A. I sent reminder emails to prospective interview candidates one week after initial emails are sent as outlined in Appendix B. I kept a master list of interview candidates and their responses to organize interview scheduling.

Participant Consent. I requested that each person I interview sign a consent form granting me permission to conduct interviews with them. The consent forms contained an explanation of the types of information that came from the study so that any potential participant had an opportunity to understand, clearly, the impact that their participation might have had on this research project. All study participants also received the necessary disclaimers regarding

their participation in the study. I audio recorded the interviews and documented in writing what I observed while visiting the campuses. I did not use any special instruments to collect data, and no compensation was provided for the participants. The observations and interviews started in May 2019 and were completed by July 2019.

IRB Approval

In an effort to protect the rights of human research subjects, institutions of higher education have established Institutional Review Boards (IRB) to assure that research adheres to rigorous ethical standards. Bresler (1995) states, "With the disclosure of instances of unethical conduct of research in medical research and social science in the 1960s and 1970s, ethics emerged as a central issue in research" (p. 29).

IRB approval of research on human subjects is a necessary part of the qualitative research process. It assures researchers, research subjects, and hosting institutions that the research will be conducted ethically. In an attempt to discover new knowledge, researchers must consider the impact of their research on the people who are interviewed, observed, and surveyed. Bresler (1995) affirms, "In the quest to increase knowledge and understanding, we should be committed to the careful reflection on others, trying to increase benefit and minimize hurt" (p. 38).

The University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval process guided the ethical procedures for this research. I followed all requirements of the IRB approval process prior to initiating any contact with potential research subjects. I also received IRB approval to conduct my research at Caxin Community College, however institutional permissions were not necessary from Willis State University as their policies did not require review by the WSU IRB since no one at WSU would be assisting in conducing my study. Consent provided clear authorization and approval for me to conduct my observations and

interviews on the two campuses. There were no vulnerable groups within the sample that fit the research questions. My research was conducted ethically and within the required compliance criteria.

Data Collection

Primary data was collected over approximately a four-month period. The primary method of data collection was through face-to-face interviews with key participants as described in the section below. Additional data was derived from document analysis and observations. The use of multiple data sources such as observation, interview, questionnaire, or a literature review is a qualitative research validity method called triangulation, which assist in assessing agreement among data sources (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Gliner, 1994). For this study, triangulation was established through a thorough analysis of the literature and examination of previous research findings, participant interview with transcript analysis and coding, document analysis with coding, as well as direct observations and field note coding and analysis. Collected data required meticulous examination; however, the thoroughness of this methodology yielded comprehensive findings. All data collected from the participants remains confidential and in my sole possession, in a locked and/or secure space. I have been and remain the only person with access to the data and now that the research is completed, and I have submitted all findings and conclusions for approval.

Research Setting

Most of the research for this study was conducted on the Caxin Community College and the Willis State University campuses. CCC is located .2 miles from the WSU Campus. Campus staff accommodated room reservations for all campus interview room reservation needs. Interviewees were offered the choice to meet in a private meeting room, in their respective office

if that option was available at that location, or via phone. All interviews took place face-to-face, except for one that was conducted via phone call. The three observations were conducted on the Caxin Community College campus. The observations were conducted in open spaces and rooms where the Joint Transition Program and Annual Memorandum of Understanding meeting activities took place.

Interviews

Qualitative inquiry, or the perceived and accepted reality of participants without the researcher's personal bias, were the primary means for obtaining data for this study (Gliner, 1994). Data for this study was primarily be obtained from face-to-face interviews, and via phone when face-to-face meetings were impossible, with campus individuals who make decisions concerning and implement vertical transfer student programming. One-on-one interviews were conducted with staff from both institutions who were chosen based on their nomination from their respective Senior Student Affairs Official and their experience with the Joint Transition Program. Interviews with individuals who oversaw Joint Transition Program responsibilities in four different institutional functional areas from the two institutions were conducted to ensure that perspectives came from a balanced group of participants. I attempted to have an even distribution of participants from Caxin Community College and Willis State University as well as balanced representation from each functional area.

I selected a semi-structured interview format that consisted of a guiding list of interview questions to ask each participant. Deming's PDSA Cycle and Model for Improvement (The W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017) served as a framework for interview questions. I obtained approval from the interviewees to audio record the interviews and explained at responses would be kept confidential. I asked each interviewee most all of the questions on my list, sometimes

omitting a question if it had been previously answered. Differences between their responses were be noted, attributing the differences to variations among the perceptions of the constituents versus the questions they were asked (Denzin, 1989). I probed beyond the original interview questions to arrive at a greater understanding of the individual participants' responses. Follow-up questions led to an increased overall understanding and appreciation of various points of view. A full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

Participant Profiles/Demographics

Nineteen participants were recommended by the Senior Student Affairs Officials to participate in this study. I emailed all 19 nominees early in June of 2019 and was able to secure participation from 17 of them after the first or second email. Two of the nominees were unable to participate because of time conflicts. One additional interviewee was referred during the interview process as a participant who had the expertise to richly inform the study. All 18 of the interview participants held a current position at one of the participating institutions at the time of the interview. All participants had overseen or currently oversaw duties related to the Joint Transition Program.

Three of the interview participants held senior level roles, five of the interview participants held mid-level roles, four of the interview participants held service-oriented roles, and six of the interview participants held program-oriented roles. All of the participants had been employed with their respective institution and the Joint Transition Program for at least one year. All of the interview participants were able to provide their perspectives and insights concerning the Joint Transition Program respective to their position and position-related duties.

Table 1 provides assigned pseudonym, affiliated institution and related functional area, as described in Chapter 3 for the 18 interview participants.

Table 1

Participant Description

Participant	Pseudonym	Institution	Functional Area
Participant 1	Marylin Masters	Caxin Community College	Senior Level Role
Participant 2	Kaitlin Peterson	Caxin Community College	Program Oriented
Participant 3	Sandra Fredrickson	Caxin Community College	Service Oriented
Participant 8	Terry Meier	Caxin Community College	Mid-Level Role
Participant 9	Jasmine Brothers	Caxin Community College	Program Oriented
Participant 11	Joann Cole	Caxin Community College	Service Oriented
Participant 15	Jess Polovitch	Caxin Community College	Mid-Level Role
Participant 16	Pat Sheen	Caxin Community College	Service Oriented
Participant 18	Paul Oak	Caxin Community College	Senior Level Role
Participant 4	Nancy Iverson	Willis State University	Mid-Level Role
Participant 5	Tammy Raymond	Willis State University	Service Oriented
Participant 6	Kat Artson	Willis State University	Program Oriented
Participant 7	Debbie Peterson	Willis State University	Mid-Level Role
Participant 10	Marine Long	Willis State University	Mid-Level Role
Participant 12	Steve Torgerson	Willis State University	Program Oriented
Participant 13	Hans Solomon	Willis State University	Program Oriented
Participant 14	Robert Belvedere	Willis State University	Program Oriented
Participant 17	Lana Santisteven	Willis State University	Senior Level Role

Participant Interviews

I traveled to the campus locations to conduct the interviews arranging locations that were

most convenient for interviewees. I scheduled one-on-one interviews to be conducted in-person in a conference room on participants' respective campus in order to obtain various participant perspectives in their natural, institutional setting. In order to obtain answers to my research questions and to capture the true perceptions of the interviewees, I felt that face-to-face interviews are the most appropriate qualitative research tool. Sixteen of the 18 interviews were conducted face-to-face on the participants respective campus. Two interviews, however, were conducted via distance; one via Skype for Business and one via telephone due to scheduling conflicts.

I conducted the interviews using the semi structured interview protocol. Data collection began in June 2019 and continued through August 2019. The data collection period was sufficient because of the ability to schedule several interviews per day. I collected all interview recordings by using an audio recording device, which allowed the participants to communicate in person, via Skype for Business or via telephone. At the beginning of each interview, I provided an overview of the interview structure to each participant. All informed consent documents were signed and returned to the researcher prior to the interviews. Participants were then each asked whether they agreed to be audiotaped to ensure all responses were captured. Once the participant agreed to be audio recorded, the interview began. I informed each participant when I turned on the recording and when I turned off the recording.

Each respondent participated in an estimated 45 minute-long one-on-one interview to provide answers to the 20 prepared interview questions. Follow-up questions were asked for clarification or additional information or some questions were omitted if the participant had answered the question without the prompt. Follow-up interviews were not required with

participants for clarification of specific themes, questions that emerged from the individual interviews, document review or member checking.

Once the recordings where collected, I used Rev transcription services using human professionals to transcribe the recordings verbatim. "It is important for qualitative research that transcripts be verbatim accounts of what transpired in the interview; this is, they should not be edited or otherwise tidied up to make them sound better" (Poland, 1994, p. 302). When the interviewee pauses, laughs, coughs, is interrupted, garbles their speech, strongly emphasizes a word or subject, or paraphrases others, it should be denoted in the transcript of the interview. The accuracy and trustworthiness of interview transcripts are important indicators regarding the validity of the researcher's claims and findings (Morse & Field, 1995; Poland, 1994). In an attempt to capture the complete essence of the interview, the transcribed questions and responses included verbal statements, observed gestures, facial expressions, sighs, pauses, and the like.

After transcribing the interviews, I engaged in member-checking and followed-up with all interview participants to ensure the transcribed responses were accurately reflective of their responses and their perceptions related to the interview. Participants were provided the full transcripts and were asked to make any clarifying or corrective mark ups to the transcript and send back to the researcher. Nine of the 18 participants responded with suggested clarifications or changes. The accuracy of the transcriptions led to very few changes and updates from the interview participants. All of the completed transcriptions are maintained on a computer and on cloud storage that is password protected with my personal password.

Because the interview protocol contained a specific set of questions, there were not any unusual circumstances in the interviews. One participant did, however, ask several questions about how she would be identified or quoted in the study even after thorough explanation. I

posed my questions in an objective manner based on the questions listed in the interview protocol. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interview protocol, some participants did ask for clarification of some questions. On occasion, I asked some of the participants for additional details for the clarification and the responses. In sum, the data collection matched the exact description of the data collection in Chapter 3.

Table 2 contains a description of the date, time, place, and duration for the interviews that I conducted.

Table 2

Interview Protocol for Interview Participants

Participant	Date	Time	Place	Duration
Marylin Masters	6/17/19	4:30 PM CST	CCC Private Meeting Room	35:45:00
Kaitlin Peterson	6/18/19	8:00 AM CST	CCC Private Office	46:47:00
Sandra Fredrickson	6/18/19	9:30 AM CST	CCC Private Office	1:06:42
Nancy Iverson	6/18/19	11:00 AM CST	WSU Private Meeting Room	40:28:00
Tammy Raymond	6/18/19	12:30 PM CST	WSU Private Meeting Room	59:08:00
Kat Artson	6/18/19	2:00 PM CST	WSU Private Meeting Room	52:58:00
Debbie Peterson	6/18/19	3:30 PM CST	WSU Private Meeting Room	36:07:00
Terry Meier	7/15/19	8:00 AM CST	CCC Common Quiet Space	42:40:00
Jasmine Brothers	7/15/19	9:15 AM CST	CCC Private Office	54:29:00
Marine Long	7/15/19	11:00 AM CST	WSU Private Office	50:52:00
Joann Cole	7/15/19	3:30 PM CST	CCC Private Office	40:24:00
Steve Torgerson	7/16/19	8:00 AM CST	WSU Private Office	27:56:00
Hans Solomon	7/16/19	9:00 AM CST	WSU Private Office	56:46:00
Robert Belvedere	7/16/19	11:00 AM CST	WSU Private Office	1:07:33

Jess Polovitch	7/22/19	9:00 AM CST	CCC Private Meeting Room	39:45:00
Pat Sheen	7/22/19	10:00 AM CST	CCC Private Meeting Room	31:22:00
Lana Santisteven	8/2/19	10:00 AM CST	Skype for Business	51:22:00
Paul Oak	8/15/19	12:00 PM CST	Phone	13:01:00

Observations

Direct observations can focus on human actions, physical environments, or real-world events. The opportunity to make such observations is one of the most distinctive features in doing case studies. Denzin (1989) defines an observation as the recording of a unit or units of interaction occurring in a concrete social situation. Denzin further claims that at the practical level, what is observed are the actions, behaviors, and attitudes of interacting individuals from which can be inferred the existence of central concepts and propositions. Using the five senses, taking field notes on what is seen, heard, or otherwise sensed is used to ultimately create a narrative. Patton (2002) explains qualitative research as "what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are..." (p. 1). In order to be in the "setting," I participated in institutional observations. The observations took place on site at the institution and may range in location and in length.

Researchers can obtain various associations and ideas while observing situations first-hand. Researchers should be clear about their intentions before beginning direct observations. They may be trying to verify a hypothesis, gather facts, describe what takes place, or may be in a discovery stage of research. Only after a researcher’s intentions are clearly defined should a researcher determine how to conduct their observations (Giorgi, 1994). I chose not to structure institutional and participant observations. This unstructured approach to participant observation

is believed to maximize the discovery and grounding of theoretical interpretations (Denzin, 1989). The observations were completed to inform my understanding of the campuses and their cultures. Information obtained from observations provided additional relevant and substantive information for my research.

The areas I observed were central to campus and student activity and dialogue. I selected various locations on the college campus, which may include libraries, advising centers, academic and/or student service offices, administrative offices and meeting rooms. I selected these locations because they are high-traffic areas that presented greater opportunity to observe campus interactions that were also central to transfer student activities. I was careful not to interfere in the dynamics of the location and the activities, though I imagined some campus individuals may have been aware of my presence and research intentions and that they may have been observed.

I documented how much time I observed each area. I took detailed typed notes in observation logs of what occurred and attempted to extensively describe my observations of the activities, behaviors, conversations or comments, body language, sights, and sounds. I identified codes, patterns and themes that appear throughout the documented information in the raw data recorded in my observation logs. Observations provided support for my research findings and conclusions, however I used unsolicited observations and comments to accurately reflect the attitudes and perceptions of the institutions' vertical transfer student programming. The interview transcripts and the documents and field notes from observations formed the body of data that I analyzed. A thorough examination of the transcribed interview content and field notes revealed codes, categories, and themes that may be extracted from the data and analyzed to provide a sense of meaning and direction for the research.

Observation of Activities

Direct observation is a valuable tool for understanding culture because it enables one to view the context in which the participants interact, it is more objective than relying upon participants perceptions and provides a holistic view of the phenomenon that is being examined (Museus, 2007). Typed notes were used to record the date, time, location, and purpose of the meetings. The notes were divided into two sections; descriptive and reflective. Descriptive notes included portions of the dialog, the physical setting and number of participants. Reflective notes included the researcher's perceptions of the participants' comments, tone of voice and body language. After each meeting notes were reviewed. Table 3 outlines observational activity location, date, time, and purpose.

During the summer of 2019, I attended three institutional activities for observational purposes on the Caxin Community College campus. I attended two Joint Transition Program student registration events and the annual Joint Transition Program Memorandum of Understanding meeting where Joint Transition Program data and the Memorandum of Understanding were reviewed and updated by both institutions.

Table 3

Observational Activities

Observational Activity	Date	Time	Place	Duration
JTP Student Registration Day	6/17/19	12:00PM CST	Caxin Community College	4 hours
Annual JTP MOU meeting	7/15/19	1:30PM CST	Caxin Community College	1 ½ hours
JTP Student Registration Day	7/22/19	12:00PM CST	Caxin Community College	4 hours

Joint Transition Program Student Registration Day - June 17th, 2019 and July 22nd, 2019

Joint Transition Program students are required to attend a registration session, which includes activities such as advising, course registration and an introduction to Willis State University residence life and student services.

The Joint Transition Program Student registration days were held on Caver Community College's campus. 11 different areas and rooms were distinctly designated for use for the day's activities. A room designation map was shared as a document for analysis. Of the 11 rooms, space was designated for: an opening presentation, a welcome, placement testing, course advising and scheduling, course registration, information technology, and cost and budgeting information.

Students and their families checked in for the event in the front commons area. Refreshments were located on a table in main lobby. Several tables were set up as student information stations in the main hallway for topics such as academic records, financial aid, and student finance. Students were welcomed to the check-in station, where they were provided a registration card and informational packet. Students were asked to return to the check-in table for checkout at the end of the day to turn in their registration card and survey. Staff were warm and welcoming to those who checked in. They were patient with their speech and greeted students by name. Students were given name tag stickers though Joint Transition Program students were given a different colored packet than non-program students and were checked-in separately.

I visited various stations. I entered a program overview session for families of Joint Transition Program students. The families were seated quietly in a classroom style room. Their students soon joined them and sat next to them. Families were visiting quietly or were on their

phones waiting patiently. Staff entered the room and welcome families to campus and explained that family members would attend family orientation while students went to testing or advising depending on their needs. I attended family orientation session. Families of Joint Transition Program and non-Joint Transition Program students filed in. Family members were encouraged to ask questions as the presenter presents a power point. Parents are attentive and seem mildly engaged.

Joint Transition Program students were placed with a Caxin Community College advisor and picked that campus's classes and then shifted to a Willis State University table to choose those classes. In the advising room, one girl was with the advisor at the back of the room while five other students were waiting, either looking at their phones or doing nothing. There were two advisors for each institution but students experienced wait times. Scheduling staggered start times could lessen wait time or time between steps. It also seemed a bit impersonal to discuss a student's coursework with other students present in the room. The advisor assisting did not ask many personal questions.

Once students complete course registration they are asked to go to the front check-in tables to hand in their surveys. There were institutionally branded promotional items students could take as they departed. Many family members were waiting around with little to do in the lobby. It seems as if additional programming could have been offered to families or scheduling could have been altered to avoid family down time. Several parents seemed to not know where their student was or what they were doing. I overheard sayings such as "I think he's around the corner" and "I am not sure what he is doing."

Overall, the Joint Transition Program Student Registration day followed its agenda and without any major noticeable glitches. The purpose of the observations was to not only

triangulate though observation what was presented in interviews, but also to understand how programming or activities for Joint Transition Programs compared to those offered to non-program students. The advising and Joint Transition Program overviews were the primary specialized activities for those students.

Annual Joint Transition Program Memorandum of Understanding Meeting - July 15th, 2019

The meeting was held in a board room on the CCC's campus where Joint Transition Program staff from both institutions sat at the table. The Senior Student Affairs Officer from CCC began with a welcome and agenda overview. There were about 15 people in attendance, nearly equally representing each institution. The agenda began with staff introductions and I introduced my purpose for attending the meeting, as well. The CCC Senior Student Affairs Officer ran the meeting in a focused, but amiable manner. Members were attentive as program data was reviewed. The CCC Senior Student Affairs Officer spoke of the program's "undocumented goal" which has evolved over the years to not only include successful transition from CCC to WSU but also to assist students in finding the institution that best fits their needs to further student success in higher education. The WSU Senior Student Affairs Officer expressed her contentment with presented data results.

The meeting continued with two staff members from each institution commenting on initial outreach to students after they are offered participation in the Joint Transition Program. Staff discussed how revisions to the student Joint Transition Program offer letter is now more focused on the Joint Transition Program offer rather than the admission denial from WSU. Staff discussed how students are responding more positively to these letters than in years past and the percentage of students who have accepted the offer into the Joint Transition Program has

increased. Staff also discussed how outreach to students who have been offered admission into the Joint Transition Program has been fine tuned in regard to timing and method. Continued staff discussion reinforced the needs to be strategic with timing of student communications and offering an electronic option for students to submit an intent to participate form, especially for those who cannot attend a Learn About Joint Transition Program Day.

Staff recapped the Learn About Joint Transition Program Day, a day where prospective Joint Transition Program students are invited to campus to learn if the program is a good fit for them. Discussion was positive concerning the marketing efforts and one staff member suggested offering a weekday option, so students are able to see what campus is like while students are present.

Staff returned to the topic of publication materials and student communications. The CCC Joint Transition Program Coordinator informed the group that they were creating a video about the program to place on the web or use at other events to highlight the program, its benefits and student testimonials. The CCC Joint Transition Program Coordinator stated that publication materials were being revised to update program information, include current student testimonials and streamline verbiage to create clarity and succinct information for students. She stated that she was looking to remove less valuable information and focus on what is vital for students to make an informed decision. She was seeking to create a more inviting Joint Transition Program brochure and reinforce the co-branding of both institutions, so students get a sense of acceptance from both institutions. The CCC Senior Student Affairs Officer also noted that the Joint Transition Program website is being revised to be more inviting and that the Marketing Department was working on it.

Staff discussed how communications for current Joint Transition Program students who are preparing to transfer to WSU are not meeting desired timing. Staff were reminded to review the Joint Transition Program transition checklist in the handbook and are specifically reminded to assure that student applications to transition to WSU are needed before grades are due in their last term at CCC. Staff were reminded that application does not assure eligibility to transition because final grades are not posted but is required if they do meet the requirements. The Director for Admission from WSU also suggested communication improvement for students who apply to transition to WSU but are denied. She suggested formal communication be created so students are aware of missed requirements and next steps.

Staff discussed the orientation course students are required to take in their first semester of the program at WSU. Though it is now only offered to Joint Transition Program students, its original intent was to help students intermingle with other WSU students. Staff discussed the need to revisit this course offering and intent at future meetings.

Finally, staff discussed the Memorandum of Understanding. Staff were reassured that the Joint Transition Program was not going away and that WSU was looking to open housing opportunities not only to Joint Transition Program students but also any CCC student, as their campus does not currently offer on-campus housing.

Staff discussed the importance of this annual meeting to discuss items above and beyond the scope of the Memorandum of Understanding and use the meeting to improve the program.

Staff discussed that the Memorandum of Understanding had not seen any updates in a couple of years, but reinforced that updates weren't needed at the current time as the wording still held true and was sufficient. Staff finished the meeting with discussion concerning the requirements Joint Transition Program students must fulfill to transfer fully to WSU. Staff

expressed that there are times when a reasonable policy exception can and should be made. Staff agreed that the best way to proceed with such exceptions was to fully document any exception and gain approval from both institutions, but not to include such specificity in the don't want in the Memorandum of Understanding.

The Annual Joint Transition Program Memorandum of Understanding Meeting provided an opportunity to not only triangulate though observation what was presented in interviews, but also to understand how improvement conversations and initiatives were started. The MOU Meeting, as stated in the interview, is a pinnacle event concerning the Joint Transition Program continual improvement.

The observational activities conducted at Caxin Community College provided a rich opportunity for triangulation. There were no conflicts overserved in what occurred during the Joint Transition Program Student Registration Day or the Annual Memorandum of Understanding meeting and how staff and documents explained the events through interviews. Each event seemed to play out according to the agenda and confirmed participant interview statements and document details.

Document Analysis

Documents such as public and private records are valuable sources of information in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). When document evidence is combined with interviews and observation, bias can be minimized, and credibility increased. Bowen (2009) points out that reviewing documents can serve a variety of purposes. These include:

- Providing background and context
- Stimulation for additional questions that should be asked
- A source of supplementary data (in addition to interviews and observation)

- Verification of findings from other data sources

I requested relevant Joint Transition Program documentation from the Senior Student Affairs Official at each institution and accessed some from the public facing institutional websites. The Senior Student Affairs Official from Caxin Community College provided documents that referenced the program and both institutions. The documents used in this study included webpages, memorandums of understanding, program handbooks, program brochures, program data, position descriptions, and student forms. These documents were reviewed as a means to gain additional insight into the institutions' vertical transfer programming. I conducted a thorough examination of the form and content. I documented codes, categories, and themes to provide a sense of meaning and direction for the research. I've stored an electronic copy of each document used for analysis.

These documents were reviewed for the purpose of gaining historical and contextual data and to validate information gained during interviews and observations. The documents proved to be a rich source of data that, combined with the interviews, and observations helped to verify the credibility of the information and allow for triangulation (Gall et al., 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Table 4

Analyzed Documents

Name	Number	Current vs. Historical	Public vs. Private	Purpose/Type
Registration & Orientation Day FAQ Website	5	Current	Public	Informational web page
Joint Transfer Program Evaluation	1	Current	Private	Student Experience Evaluation

Ask Me About Transfer FAFSA	1	Current	Private	Financial Aid Information Handout
New Student Registration and Orientation Email	1	Current	Private	New Student Registration and Orientation Informational Email
Joint Transfer Program Registration and Orientation Day Layout Map	1	Current	Private	Room Layout Map
Joint Transfer Program New Student Checklist	1	Current	Private	Student Registration Day Task List
Joint Transfer Program Annual Meeting Agenda	1	Current	Private	Annual Meeting Agenda
Joint Transfer Program Handbook	1	Historical	Private	Joint Transfer Program Student Handbook
Joint Transfer Program Intent to Participate Form	1	Current	Private	Student Sign Up Form to Participate in Joint Transfer Program
Joint Transfer Program MOU	1	Historical to Current	Private	Joint Transfer Program Student Data
Joint Transfer Program Transition Checklist	1	Current	Private	Joint Transfer Program Student Transition Checklist
Joint Transfer Program Student Aid Handout	1	Current	Private	Joint Transfer Program Financial Aid Handout
Joint Transfer Program Web Registration Page	1	Current	Public	Joint Transfer Program Registration Sign Up Web Page
Joint Transfer Program Coordinator Position Description	1	Historical	Private	Joint Transfer Program Coordinator Position Description

Joint Transfer Program Tutoring Coordinator Position Description	1	Historical	Private	Joint Transfer Program Tutoring Coordinator Position Description
Joint Transfer Program Student Success Specialist Position Description	1	Historical	Private	Joint Transfer Program Tutoring Coordinator Position Description
Joint Transfer Program Registration Day Workflow	1	Current	Private	Joint Transfer Program Registration Day Workflow

Data Analysis

Overview

Before beginning any data collection, I met with my committee who reviewed the first three chapters of my research. We met face-to-face to resolve issues concerning trustworthiness or assumptions that were be identified. I began data collection once a final review of the first three chapters was finalized. I began a content analysis, coding, and data analysis by reviewing participant interviews, documents, and observations.

Content Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is a process that seeks to reduce vast amounts of information, often from different sources it into a series of variables, or patterns for examination (Bernard, 1995; Hatch, 2002; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Because qualitative analysis relies on researchers' impressions, it is vital that qualitative analysis is systematic and that researchers report impression in a structured and transparent form.

An approach that takes a more exploratory perspective, encouraging the coding of all data, is an approach called thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

> Applying thematic networks is simply a way of organizing a thematic analysis of qualitative data. Thematic analyses seek to unearth the themes salient in a text at different levels, and thematic networks aim to facilitate the structuring and depiction of these themes. Clearly, the process of deriving themes from textual data and illustrating these with some representational tool is well established in qualitative research (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p.387).

The full process of analysis, as seen in Table 5, can be split into three broad stages: (a) the reduction or breakdown of the text; (b) the exploration of the text; and (c) the integration of the exploration. The process of content analysis begins with coding. Lofland and Lofland (1995) assert that the researcher must continually ask questions about the data being collected and begin to develop basic codes, or understandings of intricacies of the data. Once these initial codes amass, they are reexamined and refined. This examination assesses the available codes and begins to combine or eliminate codes that do not fit the overall scheme into focused codes (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Finally, thematic networks and interpretation of codes and themes was conducted.

Table 5

Steps in Analyses Employing Thematic Networks

ANALYSIS STAGE A: REDUCTION OR BREAKDOWN OF TEXT
Step 1. Code Material
(a) Devise a coding framework
(b) Dissect text into text segments using the coding framework
Step 2. Identify Themes
(a) Abstract themes from coded text segments
(b) Refine themes
Step 3. Construct Thematic Networks
(a) Arrange themes
(b) Select Basic Themes

(c) Rearrange into Organizing Themes
(d) Deduce Global Theme(s)
(e) Illustrate as thematic network(s)
(f) Verify and refine the network(s)

ANALYSIS STAGE B: EXPLORATION OF TEXT

Step 4. Describe and Explore Thematic Networks
(a) Describe the network
(b) Explore the network

Step 5. Summarize Thematic Networks

ANALYSIS STAGE C: INTEGRATION OF EXPLORATION
Step 6. Interpret Patterns

(Attride-Stirling, 2001, p.391).

Coding Process

This examination of the data to find key words and phrases that describe the process is referred to as open coding (Morse & Field, 1995). "Open coding is the part of the analysis that pertains specifically to naming and categorizing phenomena through close examination of data" (Mertens, 2005, p. 424). Open coding is a process that takes the data and breaks it down into discrete parts that are closely examined and compared for similarities and differences. Events, happenings, objects, and actions that are found to be conceptually similar in nature or related in meaning are grouped under more abstract concepts that seem to fit or cluster together (Straus & Corbin 1998).

Upon conclusion of data collection, my coding process emerged. A three-step coding process was used to reach the resulting themes of this study. This successive process led to results that were developed and integrated into themes answering the research question. Figure 3 below illustrates the coding process.

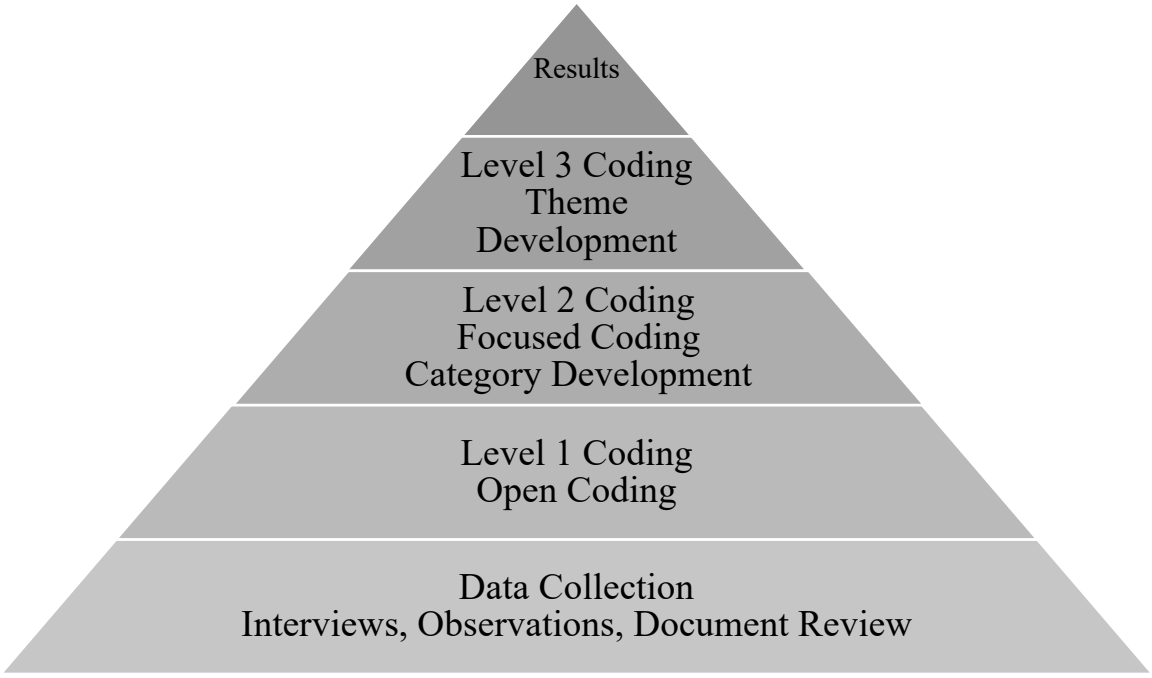

Figure 3. Coding Levels. Qualitative research requires a successive process during coding and analysis so that results can be developed and integrated into themes that answer the research questions being posed.

Upon remedying any issues with some the interview transcripts, Level 1 coding began. During Level 1 coding, open coding of the data was the initial focus. During Level 1 coding, extensive review of the data was performed and notes were taken to identify initial codes. After the audio recordings from the 18 interviews were transcribed; I began coding each participant interview individually, which included highlighting relevant quotes and key ideas, guided by concepts from the literature review and theoretical concepts. I was able to identify codes from the participant interviews to clearly categorize codes for this data source into an Excel spreadsheet.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) noted that for qualitative research, data collection and data analysis are processes that are completed in tandem. When analyzing data, the process should be ongoing through the collection process to ensure that data are managed and focused (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).This process allowed me to identify themes and to categorize the information into

data sets that were used to identify effective attributes of how two institutions create and improve vertical transfer programming. After the initial round of coding was conducted of the participant interviews and observation activities was completed, I then analyzed documents for initial coding. Upon completion of Level 1 coding, 57 initial codes were derived from the interviews, observations and documents as documented in Table 6 below. Of the 57 initial codes, the majority of the codes were derived from interviews as they provided the largest portion of the coded data; however, a few codes originated from observations and document analysis. Primarily, the codes from observations and document analysis served to corroborate with those established from interviews.

Moving into Level 2, further analysis and determination of codes identified in Level 1 was conducted to refine the codes and develop categories. Data from participant interviews, observations and documents were further refined. Level 2 coding consisted of aggregating any overlapping information to develop refined codes. At this point, concepts were identified from the codes through use of code frequency and/or code similarity. As illustrated in Table 6 below, fourteen concepts emerged during Level 2 coding.

Level 3 coding was employed by examining previous coding to develop highly refined themes. In Level 3 coding, six categories emerged evolving from each previous category as documented in Table 6 below. After coding information within the first two categories, specific information could be applied to understand the Joint Transition Program's culture and how it has been created and improved. The coding of data involved in identifying the resulting themes allowed for a greater awareness of the characteristics and emerging commonalities within the data. Consequently, analyses of the data presented in the following sections will show how these triangulated categories and classifications answer the research question.

Data Analysis

For a case study, analysis consists of making a detailed description of the case and its setting (Creswell, 2013, p. 199). The data analysis phase entails pulling the data apart and putting it back together in a meaningful way. This study followed the steps suggested by Creswell (2013), which involved: (a) organizing and preparing data for analysis (transcribing interviews and writing up field notes); (b) reading and reviewing all of the data to ascertain patterns and themes; and then (c) sorting, arranging and organizing the data to arrive at the overall generalizations as a result of the study.

I listed, organized, and synthesized the coded information extracted from the interview transcripts, documents and observational data into categories. Cross analysis of the three data sources occurred as a process interval. I devised a coding framework in order to analyze emerging patterns and themes; to provide a sense of meaning and direction for the research. I looked for relationships between the categories of data that form patterns and/or common themes. As documents were reviewed and observational data collected, codes were reinforced and refined. Relationships across data were established and further refined amongst all three data sources. By staggering analysis of the data sources and refining codes throughout the process, document analysis and observational data were used to ensure trustworthiness of the data. The terms theme and pattern are used synonymously to represent what the literature refers to as an alignment of properties that emerge and characterize the collected data (Straus & Corbin, 1998). Each code was documented and organized into categories and themes. After creating the initial code list for all interviews, documents and observations, I reread the transcripts to begin solidifying emergent categories and themes.

Upon reading the transcripts and completing my initial analysis which included

identifying initial codes, categories and themes, I met with my advisor to discuss and review emergent codes, categories and themes. My advisor was allowed to make observations, ask questions and provide insight. Her input was used in developing and refining initial codes, categories and themes. The initial codes and final themes are shown below in Table 6.

Table 6

Initial Codes and Final Theme Alignment

Level 1 Codes	Level 2 Codes	Level 3 Codes
institutional cooperation	institutional cooperation	institutional commitment
institutional differences		
institutional investment		
institutional responsibility		
leadership meetings		
program meetings		
program staff		
memorandum of understanding	program foundation	
program culture		
program goals		
program impact		
program initiation		
program leadership		
program purpose		
program structure		
program validity		
reason for program		
external influences	change agent	adaptability
flexibility	program change	
identify efficiencies		
institutional changes		
program improvement		
program restructure		
program viability		
reason for restructure		
not knowing details	program communication	communication
program awareness		
program reputation		
student communication		
institutional perceptions		
measure of success	program data	data
program data		

student admission	program structure	program structure
process		
program barrier		
program cost		
program requirements		
program support services		
student courses		
program benefit	student experience	student success support
student experience		
student identification		
student opinion		
program orientation	student onboarding	
K-12 experience	student preparation	
unforeseen student issues	student challenges	
student commitment		
program success	student success	
student barriers		
student retention		
student success		
student advising	student support services	
student registration		
student support		
effective transition	transition	
program transition preparation		
student transition		

As a result of reading and organizing the data, the coding processes classified the data, leading to the development of natural themes. Six themes emerged from the data.

1. Institutional Commitment
2. Adaptability
3. Communication
4. Data
5. Program Structure
6. Student Success Support

A more detailed discussion of these themes as they relate to the research questions is provided in the following chapter.

Trustworthiness

"*Validity* refers to the accuracy and trustworthiness of instruments, data, and findings in research. Nothing in research is more important than validity" (Bernard, 1995, p. 38). While quantitative research relies heavily on measures of collecting numerical data, reliability and validity to evaluate the effectiveness of a study, qualitative research can be evaluated by its "trustworthiness" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Trustworthiness can be broken down into credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Below is a description of how each of these constructs were used throughout the research process to reassure trustworthiness. I used the following methods to reassure trustworthiness: triangulation, member checks, piloting interview questions, and researcher bias and assumptions identification (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Triangulation. Triangulation adds value and increases the trustworthiness of the data collection process of qualitative research by utilizing multiple methods (Kumar, 2014; Lichtman, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 1999). Triangulation establishes consistency of the data from one individual or one source in different contexts, times, or places. Triangulation is used to establish different patterns of agreement based on more than one method, observer, or source of data (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Gliner, 1994). As Eisner (1991) stated, the truth-value or credibility, "seeks a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility, that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusions" (p. 110).

For this study, triangulation was established through a thorough analysis of the literature and examination of previous research findings, participant interviews with transcript analysis and coding, document analysis with coding, as well as direct observations and field note coding and

analysis. The organized findings from the triangulation process revealed emerging themes to support the research question.

Member Checks. Credibility was also be established through member checks. Member checking requires the researcher to involve participants in the analysis and reporting process and are used to increase the trustworthiness of qualitative research. I conducted member checks with the interview participants to assure that I did not misinterpret responses (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Upon completing the interviews and receiving the interview transcripts from the transcriber, I conducted member checking by sending written interview transcripts to the participants and requested feedback for any unclear or misconstrued information. In sharing preliminary transcripts with them, I resolved issues of communication, clarity, opinion, or meaning. They had an opportunity to send me a response if they found any discrepancies between their interview and transcription that they received. Nine of the participants sent back corrections or updates to their transcribed interviews. Sending transcripts to those who participated in the study for them to review gave them an opportunity to share any concerns about interpretations of what they shared during the interview protocol.

Dependability

Dependability is similar to the concept of reliability in quantitative research. Dependability refers to consistency within the processes of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data (Denzin, 1994). Dependability was established by piloting interview questions with a professional comprised of an external student affairs professional who has worked with or around transfer students or transfer initiatives. My professional reviewer has master's degree in Education, a background in Academic Record and has worked in higher education for over 13 years. This process helped ensure that the data received was consistent with the questions asked.

Dependability was also established through audit trails, rich documentation, and data/environmental triangulation. An excerpt of my audit trail is documented in Table 7. In utilizing these instruments, I was able to transcribe any changes that occur and how they may affect the study. There was a clear audit trail on the data for this research including participant communication, how the collection activity occurred, when the participants provided the data, and the tools that I used to clean the data and then to analyze the data. Audit trails provide a method for increasing dependability and trustworthiness of qualitative data findings (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). There was also clarity around the demography of the participants and how each participant fit into the structure of the organization that formed the case. In addition to the audit trail for data collection, the data analysis steps have been clearly outlined with the first pass of the data analysis to find the level one codes. There was a second and third pass to identify the additional themes that emerged after reviewing the level one codes.

Table 7

Audit Trail Excerpt

Audit Task	Audit Activity	Type	Participant	Date
1	Interview request	email	Marilyn Masters	6/13/2019
2	Interview request response	email	Marilyn Masters	6/13/2019
3	Calendar Invite for Interview Sent	email	Marilyn Masters	6/14/2019
4	Room Request Sent	email	CCC Admin	6/14/2019
5	Interview	email	Marilyn Masters	6/17/2019
6	Documents 1-4 Extracted from Web	PDF	na	6/17/2019
7	Interview Transcript Member Check	email	Marilyn Masters	6/20/2019
8	Document 1-4 Coded Level 1	PDF	na	6/20/2019

9	Documents for Analysis Received	Email	Marilyn Masters	7/11/2019
10	Member Check Response	email	Marilyn Masters	7/30/2019
11	Marilyn Master Coding Level 1	document	na	7/31/2019

Confirmability

Qualitative research tends to assume that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study. Confirmability refers to the development of logical understandings of the data that can be corroborated by other researches (Denzin, 1994). For this study, I enhanced trustworthiness by documenting the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study, especially by creating rich data and using member checking. Such feedback was used to develop supportable interpretations of the data collected.

Another element of confirmability that I used for this study was the concept of reflexivity in qualitative research. My experience as a senior leader at a two-year college provided the notion of the researcher's world view (Berger, 2015). Having worked in the two-year colleges, I had professional experience that connected to the experiences expressed by interview participants and demonstrated in observations and documents. Throughout the research study, I also kept a reflexive journal that involved "the use of written field notes, memos, a field diary, process and personal notes, and a reflexive journal" Denzin (1994, p. 513). The purpose of this journal was to record the activities, ideas, and decisions I made during the research process. I used the journal as a calendar of events as I made interview appointments, set deadlines, track and sort data and findings, and identify stages of progress. Also, I used the journal as a log of my personal notes regarding my perceptions, feelings, and interactions with participants. I also identified my own biases and perceptions to assist me in reflecting on my participant

perspectives as evidenced in the data. By documenting my assumptions and unique contributions, I gain awareness, which enhanced confirmability.

Transferability

Transferability seeks to determine if the results relate to other contexts and can be transferred to other contexts (Lichtman, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Stake (1995) claims that single qualitative studies are not an adequate basis for generalizations and even suggests that generalization is not the purpose of the case study at all. Because the purpose of a case study is not to compare multiple cases, but to become intimately aware of the inner workings of a particular case, he prefers the term "particularization" to generalization. Stake (2005) proposes that if any generalization is appropriate for qualitative research it is "naturalistic generalization," which is formed by the reader as the case is unveiled.

In this study, I established transferability by providing a detailed description of the contexts, perspectives, and findings that surround the participants' experiences. The participants' ability to speak at length in response to the open ended, semi-structured interview questions created an opportunity for them to share experiences that could have been transferred both inside and outside of higher education. The open-ended questions that were in the interview protocol allowed participants to share their experiences. Transferability was increased by providing rich details drawn from the context, allowing readers the opportunity to decide for themselves whether or not the results were transferable to other circumstances (Lichtman, 2010). I maintained field notes in my reflexive journal, audio recordings of interview, and transcripts of my research experiences to provide a rich description of the findings.

Reflexivity Statement

Reflexivity statements are a researcher's attempts to be as open as possible about the sources of their thinking as they conduct their studies. Reflexivity is a process of reflecting on how the researcher could be influencing a research project a researcher attempts to be neutral influence on the research.

I earned undergraduate degree by completing course work at four different institutions. Though I did not directly participate in vertical transfer or a vertical transfer program, I have come to understand the importance of course transferability and college programming and services that assist students toward degree completion. Because I did not participate as a vertical transfer student, this could be a drawback as I do not have a shared understanding of the vertical transfer process. This could also be viewed as a benefit as I do not possess preconceived notions from a prior vertical transfer experience.

I began my career in education while studying in Canada. I began teaching English Language courses and continued teaching while living in France. I completed two master's degrees related to business, however my adult work experience has primarily concentrated around education. I began working in higher education nine year ago as the registrar at a community college working closely with transfer students, student records, institutional data and accreditation. Despite changing positions over four years ago, the range of work experiences with students, specifically transfer students, in higher education has influenced my research topic. My personal transfer experiences coupled with my direct work with student transfer has inspired me to understand student transition processes and how institutions are responding to promote student success.

Though my personal educational and work experiences have contributed to my interest in the topic of vertical transfer, I understand that I have constructed thoughts about how institutions should approach transfer students. For example, I believe that institutions should create transfer programming to encourage student transfer success, though understandably that may not be possible for all institutions. I also understand that I have a narrow understanding of other institutions' student populations (diversity, socioeconomic status, desire to transfer vertically, etc.) and their institutional struggles. Though I am able to comment in depth about my institution of employment's student population and the issues they face, they may not resonate to the same degree at other institutions. My perspectives on vertical transfer programming may influence my data collection and analysis, however via the methods listed above I worked to reduce my bias primarily via peer reviewers and keeping an open mind to learning about other institutions' programming.

My personal value systems drive my interest in pursuing qualitative research. I believe that others' voices and their right to participation and contribution, and the role of human experience is a vital source of knowledge and learning. This value has guided me to work with qualitative research methods where participant voice is a primary data collection method. I also believe that educational institutions have a duty to not only academically prepare students, but also educate and guide students in non-academic realms. This value has guided me to take interest in the programming and services provided by intuitions to assist students in their educational careers.

As a white woman who grew up in the Midwest, who did not begin college-level courses at a community college, I've needed to be cognizant of and provide methods to include diverse voices and perspectives as I began my research. I understand the access to higher education that

two-year institutions create via physical proximity and typically lower costs, for example. I realize that representing the institutions and students who are served by vertical transfer programming is essential to creating my case study and it cannot be derived from or influenced by my experiences. I believe that allowing diverse voices and perspectives to be given a platform to be heard is essential to well-rounded learning.

Data Management

The systems I used for data management included keeping signed consent forms, audio files and typed transcriptions in a locked file cabinet or on a password protected computer. I used Rev transcription services using human professionals to transcribe the recordings verbatim. In addition, I kept a list of participant identification numbers for interview participants on a password protected computer and I created a system for labeling and storing interviews. I was the only person with access to the interview identification numbers to protect participant confidentiality. The transcripts and participant identification list will be destroyed according to records retention protocol after research has concluded. My research was kept on a password protected computer with a backup copy on a secured cloud server.

Effectively organizing data was established by organizing a database using raw data that was independently inspected. Creating a database improved the reliability of the case study as it enabled me to track and organize data sources including notes, key documents, audio files and transcripts for easy retrieval at a later date. I arranged field notes, commentary, transcripts and document analysis in a chronological, document type, participant identification, event or activity data file schema. A unique identifier was given for each file that communicates crucial information about the file.

Summary

This chapter discussed the design of the study including the research questions that were addressed. It also discussed the rationale for approaching this research as a descriptive case study and the methods used in data collection and management and the validity of my research. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the methods used in data analysis and the development of the themes from the research. The final two chapters of this dissertation will examine the data to determine findings and conclusions about the research.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Introduction

This qualitative descriptive case study was designed to describe how two institutions create and improve transfer programming. Although previous research identified multiple issues and barriers vertical transfer students face during the vertical transfer process (Laanan, 2001, Townsend, 2008, Melguizo, Kienzl, & Alfonso, 2011) the majority of the information is rooted in the student perspective and fails to provide an in-depth analysis of how institutions are proactively working to create and to improve vertical transfer-related student challenges. This study is important because it complements the current literature and adds an institutional perspective to the research base.

This chapter presents an analysis of the findings from the participants' interviews, observations of activities, and review of documents. A brief description is provided for primary historical program changes and student data. A descriptive case study can yield an enormous amount of information from participant interviews, observations of activities, and documents produced by the interviewees. The data from these sources was studied and analyzed in order to develop themes that begin to answer the research question.

The last section identifies naturalistic themes that resulted from the data analysis. Data collection and analysis resulted in vivid understandings of the research environment. The coding

process identified patterns and themes to answer the research question posed in this qualitative study. The purpose of this chapter is to present these themes with the reader.

Historical Program Changes

From its inception over 11 years ago, the Joint Transition Program has experienced changes. Some change has been internally driven; however, other change has originated from external influences.

Creation

The Joint Transition Program began in 2008 with a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU from both Caxin Community College (CCC) and Willis State University (WSU) institutional presidents. The institutional presidents were the key catalysts in the creation of the program. Various staff were gathered to document and detail program processes after the initial signing of the MOU. According to documents and participant interviews, primarily admission staff from both institutions worked through minute details to create the foundation for this program in a relatively short amount of time. Interview participants recall just a few short months were given as the timeline to create program processes for roll out.

According to interviews and documents, program staff have met annually since the program's inception to review the MOU, make necessary updates, and process improvements. Though several minor changes have been made to the program over the years, participant interviews and documents unveiled that three pivotal changes have occurred within the program.

Admission Changes

Beginning in 2008, the Joint Transition Program was offered to any student denied full admission to Willis State University. Students simply opted into the program to participate. After some time, program data revealed that not all students participating in the program were finding

success. The institutions analyzed program data to examine if there were any consistent data amongst unsuccessful students. Institutional staff found that higher ACT (American College Testing®) scores (or equivalent placement scores such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test®) paired with lower student high school grade point averages generally indicated low student motivation according to student performance and anecdotal staff data. The institutions made changes to how they offered the Joint Transition Program opportunity to students. Program staff revised admission standards for the Joint Transition Program and set minimum standards to whom they offered the program instead of offering the program to any fully denied WSU applicant. Instead of allowing any student denied admission to WSU to enter the Joint Transition Program, program staff formed a set of minimum criteria for Joint Transition Program eligibility.

Funding Changes

Caxin Community College (CCC) and Willis State University (WSU) are located in the same state and the same public higher education state system. This public higher education state system experienced significant decreased appropriated legislative funding in 2017. The funding changes generated reductions in force that impacted the Joint Transition Program. In response to funding and staffing changes during this time, CCC and WSU were obliged to make several program changes. For example, the CCC Joint Transition Program Coordinator position was eliminated and many of the duties were absorbed by other staff. Today, a Joint Pathway Success Specialist oversees the program as well as other non-program related student success initiatives. Student communications regarding the program were moved to a different department rather than being conducted by the CCC Joint Transition Program Coordinator.

Data Tracking

Both institutions have experienced change concerning the Joint Transition Program's top institutional leadership. Through new eyes and a desire to understand and learn about the program, the new program leaders asked many questions about the program that led to the creation of formal Joint Transition Program data that is now reviewed annually at the Joint Transition Program annual MOU meeting. Prior to this time, data was housed in different departments across both campuses, but the change in leadership and the desire to understand the program lead to formal, centralized program data available to both institutions' program constituents.

Program Data

Despite changes in how formal data has been tracked, tracked programmatic data exists from the inception of the program. Since the Joint Transition Program began in the Fall of 2008, a total of 681 students have elected to participate in the program. Though the mission of the Joint Transition Program is to successfully transition students from CCC to WSU to obtain a bachelor-level degree, the data show that not all students have moved through the program as the mission describes. The primary goals or targets for this program were to help successfully transition students from CCC to WSU, however because the program never established a minimum annual number of students to enter the program, transition through the program or complete their bachelor's degree it is difficult to discern if the program was successful in achieving specific goals that were pre-defined.

This data assists in framing the thematic analysis originating from the participant interviews, observational data and document review. Table 8 shows the outcome of the students since the inception of the program through Spring 2019. Reviewing program data that has no ties

to target or benchmark data, has reinforced the notion that and taught me that setting a goal is essential to program evaluation and success.

Table 8

Joint Transition Program Student Data Fall 2008 – Spring 2019

Cohort Total	Currently Enrolled in JTP	Transferred to CCC, currently enrolled	Transferred to CCC	Transferred to WSU, currently enrolled	Transferred to WSU	Transferred to different institution	Status Unknown	Graduated from CCC	Graduated from WSU
681	38	47	42	54	172	170	158	22	45

Emergent Themes

As a result of reading, organizing, coding, and classifying the data, analysis of the data led to the development of natural themes. The six recurring themes emerging from the data about the creation and improvement of vertical transfer programming were: Institutional Commitment, Adaptability, Communication, Data, Program Structure, and Student Success Support.

The emergent theme of Student Success Support was the most commonly mentioned theme of all of the responses. Each participant who addressed the theme of Student Success Support or any of its subsets made several references to this theme throughout their responses to the semi-structured interview questions, which is the reason why the Student Success Support theme, including all of its subsets, had a higher number of references than any of the other themes. Table 9 below shows the frequency of participant references that were coded to each theme.

The creation of this study's themes relies heavily on interview data, given they comprised the majority of the data collected. The observational activities and document analysis served several vital purposes. Not only did these documents and observational activities lead to the creation of codes and corroborate statements, data and coding created from interview data, but I

was able to learn several things about the program that was impossible to capture with interviews alone. For example, I was able to learn that the way the program documents its activities is the way they play out when activities take place. There weren't any discrepancies between the way the program was detailed on paper to how it was observed in person. Additionally, through observation activities I was able to gain a sense of the culture as depicted in the documents and interviews. The program staff were genuine, helpful, and authentic.,

Table 9

Frequency of Referenced Themes

Theme	Frequency of Reference
Institutional Commitment	384
Adaptability	222
Communication	162
Data	113
Program Structure	224
Student Success Support	654
Total References	1759

These themes were essential to the creation and improvement of this case study. Each of the six themes is summarized as participants detailed below.

Theme 1: Institutional Commitment

The Institutional Commitment theme is defined as the buy-in, collaboration and willingness to meet and exceed the program's agreed upon mission and vision by both institutions. This theme encompasses level 1 codes such as program initiation and purpose, institutional investment, responsibility and cooperation, and memorandum of understanding.

Each participant who addressed the theme of Institutional Commitment or any of its subsets made several, all nearly positive references to this theme. Participants at all functional levels made reference to this theme, as well. This is an indication that the Institutional Commitment theme was not only important to the participants but also to the viability of the program.

Program Foundation. Concerning the origination of the program, Paul Oak, a senior level CCC staff member, stated:

> It [the vertical transfer program] really was stemmed from the desire of the two presidents at the time to create collaboration partnership opportunities. How could we use the strengths of both institutions to better serve students? We wanted to create a stronger working relationship between the two institutions, the two presidents did, and this was one of several initiatives that were attempted, successful, …

Marilyn Masters, a senior level CCC staff member, stated, "...when it was created, there was this whole perspective that there was a lot of untapped opportunity for individuals to come to this state." Hans Solomon, a program oriented WSU staff member, added, “I think the ultimate goal was to allow students who look like they may have the potential to succeed, but haven't fully shown that through academic testing, to be able to have the access to a four-year education.”

Not only did participants reinforce statements concerning the presidential initiative to create such a program, they also spoke extensively about creating processes to assure the program was able to get up and running. Lana Santisteven, a senior level WSU staff member, recalled that, “It basically came down from the president as an edict and we had very little time to put it together. We also had very little input into how it was to operate.” Marine Long, a mid-level WSU staff member, added that in the early stages of the program, “process overtook

purpose conversations and that's why some of that [conversation concerning purpose] has been happening later." According to interviews, the program's purpose and processes were formalized at the beginning of the program through the Memorandum of Understanding, however goal setting did not and still has not been formally documented within the program.

Document analysis confirm the above statements concerning the lack program goals. In the program data submitted for analysis, there are no existing benchmarks, goals or targets. Additionally, benchmarks, goals or targets were not observed during observational activities. Though the program's mission and vision do not include a goal of student transfer to other institutions or completion at CCC, many of the other participants reference this concept. Jasmine Brothers, a program-oriented CCC staff member, detailed her perspective of the program's goals:

> Really one of the goals of Joint Transition Program is to make them [students] successful in getting a degree, whether that's a degree there at WSU, here at CCC or a degree at another school. Although, that's not in writing anywhere, that's not the mission statement, but it's the underlying.

The program also has yet to include CCC graduates or student transfer to another institution as a part of the program's formalized mission and vision. Though staff state that these are undocumented goals, they were only informally referenced in participant interviews, not in any formal documentation. Tammy Raymond, a service oriented WSU staff member, stated, "if they would have stepped back and maybe said let's implement it [the program] the following fall, I think some of those initial questions, road bumps, all of those things, maybe could have been talked through better so that the program maybe would have been more successful from the start."

Institutional cooperation. Interview participants commented on the strong partnership

the two institutions have fostered since the signing of the initial Memorandum of Understanding in 2008. “The people that did it [created the program] had a really good relationship, but I think it's gotten even stronger,” stated Jess Polovitch, a mid-level CCC staff member. Sandra Fredrickson, a service oriented CCC staff member, confirmed by saying:

> I think what is really cool about it is the collaboration between the two colleges and the fact that both Presidents made this big to do over at WSU. There was a press conference that both of them signed on this letter of support or something to continue the program. So, I think the leadership at both institutions feels that it's valuable.

Participants reiterated the dedication that both institutions have had since its inception in 2008 and that without such cooperation and dedication that the program would not be where it is today. Marine Long expressed that:

> I think just having everybody come together like we do every summer really has been instrumental in making that change happen. Having people at the table who've got student development background rather than just somebody from admission or just somebody that processes things is really key to improving the program.

The creation of the formal Memorandum of Understanding and of a dedicated annual meeting to review the MOU for needed updates and improvements was a key element in creating the institutional commitment theme.

Theme 2: Adaptability

The Adaptability theme is defined as the willingness to change and adapt the program for the purpose of improvement or out of necessity by using data or other information by both institutions. This theme encompasses level 1 codes such as identifying efficiencies, program improvement, and program viability. Participants who addressed this theme spoke to the changes

and improvements the program has encountered as well as the viability of the program. Again, participants of all functional levels made reference to this theme, as well indicated that the adaptability of the institutions and programming have led to the program's longevity.

Program change. As the Historical Change section above outlines, the Joint Transition Program has experienced significant change and improvement regarding how if offers the program to students. Lana Santisteven explained:

> The heart of the conversation was we were trying to meet a need of students. Because there were a lot of students who wanted to be at WSU, they wanted a large campus experience, but they just weren't ready. At that time, we invited everyone who was denied from WSU into the program, and I think a few years later kind of learned that that wasn't a great approach. The president, he was like, "Well, let's not get them [the students] just to boost our numbers. Let's do this really to increase the success of students and maybe we should only be taking the students that we really truly believe are successful here. And then shortly after that, I think we felt the freedom to say, "Okay, maybe there are certain students who really don't belong in this program at all, and so we should be a little more selective and not just invite everyone who was denied.

Several other participants commented on this program change, while documents confirm. Though the change lessened the number of students offered admission into the program, program staff comments and student statistics demonstrate improved student success rates. The revised admission standards have improved the success of students, therefore strengthening the program.

Interview participants spoke extensively about how the program has created efficiencies. Kat Artson, a program-oriented WSU staff member, stated, "Creativity in the programming has created opportunity." Marine Long, who has years of experience with this program, stated, "So

I've seen it [the program] progress and I've definitely seen it refined over that course of time." Pat Sheen, a service-oriented CCC staff member, affirmed, "We tweak them [processes] to make them work better, which is something that's always ongoing." As an example, participants spoke to the technological efficiencies that have been implemented. Robert Belvedere, a program-oriented WSU staff member, commented, "The scheduling [of classes] is something I think we just assume is going to happen. We've added technology to deal with it and all of those fun things that it can do." Jess Polovitch added, "One thing that they've done too is they've created a drive that WSU staff who need, and CCC staff who need, can have access to that same spot." Streamlining the scheduling of classes so students who attend two schools can simplify scheduling and the electronic share of data between institutions has improved operations to the benefit of staff and students. Marine Long concluded, "I think it has taken some time to find the right services and the right balance and the right advising for students. And I really feel like things have clicked the last couple of years."

Drivers of Change. Finally, internal and external drivers of change have required adaptability within the program. Interview participants spoke to the notion of change and its relation to program viability. The long-standing program has endured time and several changes, however, Kaitlin Peterson, a program oriented CCC staff member, mentions that with budget cuts and positions changes it hasn't always been easy to maintain the program. "We've gone through quite a bit of transition trying to fill the demand of the program with our resources." Despite challenges, specifically those originating from external sources, the program has evolved to endure to serve its program mission to serve students. Lana Santisteven recounted:

> As we've refined the program, I think we all feel more comfortable that this is a win-win for students, that we're meeting a particular niche of students, and they're probably mostly students from our region who wouldn't otherwise come to either of our institutions.
>
> The notion of adaptability and the willingness of both institutions to come together in the face of change to work collaboratively toward serving student success had been a vital piece to the program's ability to stand the test of time.

Though external and internal changes have challenged the viability of the program, the ability to be adaptable has kept the program stable and able to focus toward the mission of serving student success.

Theme 3: Communication

The Communication theme is defined as the internal and external communication about and messaging concerning the program by both institutions. This theme encompasses level 1 codes such as program awareness, program reputation, and student communication. Participants who addressed the theme of communication describe how the program is marketed as well as the importance of intentional, cohesive communication. Primarily program and service-oriented functional-level participants made reference to this theme, which may indicate that program communication is generally served out of such functional-levels or impacts their work the most.

Program awareness and program reputation. When speaking to the notion of program awareness and program reputation, participants explained that general awareness about the program is difficult to describe as the program is not outwardly marketed to general populations. Concerning internal communication, Sandra Fredrickson disclosed that the program could be better communicated to staff or a better-informed staff could be beneficial to the students in the program. Sandra stated that after losing the program coordinator due to budget changes, more

employees were asked to become involved as the position duties were dispersed amongst a few rather than siloed in one position. Sandra stated, “I think previously it was unfortunate that most staff at CCC knew very little about it. Again, I think that's starting to change, where I think that's a really positive side effect of having lost that position.” Though difficult to lose a program employee, the change created greater awareness of the program amongst staff, which is now viewed as a benefit.

Concerning external or student and family communications, students are able to learn about the Joint Transition Program only after they are sent a letter of denial for full admission to Willis State University. The institutions speak about the program with high school counselors if asked during recruitment, however, do not outwardly market to students or other parties. Hans Solomon shared that often times when working with a student who has been denied full admission to Willis State University that students are at first confused because they do not understand what the offer means in its entirety.

Solomon explained that follow up communications with Joint Transitions Program offered students is where much of the detail is revealed. Hans stated the following concerning the idea of denial of full admission to Willis State University:

> It feels a little bit more comforting to say, "Okay. Well, we can't give you full admission to WSU, or even conditional admission. But we can give you this Joint Transition Program offer, which is a direct route to WSU and a four-year education. We go through that, discuss what it is. And then once they open themselves up to hearing it, some of them are actually pretty excited about it. Because the way that it's packaged is that you're going to get more support with this than you would if you were just fully admitted to WSU.

Solomon also spoke to the idea that many students are disappointed or even upset when they hear of their denial of full admission to WSU. He articulated that the way the institutions communicate about the opportunity is vital in hopes to earn that student as a Joint Transition Program Student. Hans described that:

> There was some intention in offering you Pathway rather than denial. Then they feel like, "Okay, I've been actually reviewed and discussed rather than just cast aside. Even some parents get pretty excited about that. Some students feel like, "Okay, yeah. That's actually more what I would like. I would like this because I know that there's some areas that I still need to work on, and I'm ready to do that.

Crafting messages that take into account the readers' perceptions reassures students of the intention surrounding and opportunity contained within the Joint Transition Program.

Student communication. In regard to communications to students, Sandra Fredrickson shared Hans Solomon's ideas that the way in which the program is communicated is vital. Sandra explained during the Memorandum of Understanding meeting that student communications were currently being revised to highlight the positive aspects of the program and the opportunity it presents rather than the denial of full admission to WSU. She stated, "I think we need to rework this communication, make sure it's clear." Sandra reinforced the importance of writing clear, intentional messages assures that messages are understandable and interpreted as intended.

> And even though things are communicated, if people don't take the initiative to do some of that research on their own or ask those questions, again first generation college students or new American students, whatever, people who may just not know what to ask because it's all so brand new.

Though communication was the second to last most mentioned theme, it remains a vital concept in regard to the success of this program. If internal staff and students and their families are unable to learn about the program and be attracted to the program, interview participants alluded to the idea that the program could not exist. Program staff are evidently revising communication to improve the program which also ties back to the theme of adaptability.

Theme 4: Data

The Data theme can be defined as the collection and use of formal data by both institutions. This theme encompasses level 1codes such as program data and measures of success. Though this theme was referenced least frequently, the participant discussion on this topic produced rich idea. Participants who addressed the theme of data spoke to the evolution and importance of data, as well as well as how program success is measured. Participants spoke to how important data is to evaluate the program and even voiced differing views concerning the success of the program. Participants of all functional-levels made reference to this theme, as well. This is an indication that the theme of data was not only important to the participants but also possibly that institutional collaboration efforts such as the annual Memorandum of Understanding meeting, where program data is discussed, is successful at making staff aware of program data.

Program Data. When discussing program data, participants stated that data was not something that was formally collected from the inception of this program. When participants referenced program data, often times they referred to the student tracking data as seen in Table 8. There was never a formal definition of program data described during interviews other than that which is referenced in Table 8. Most all participants knew of this data, but only half seemed to know and understand it well. Lana Santisteven stated, “To create this pathway, I think the

thinking about data really was a hindsight." Jess Polovitch verified the idea that data collection was not formalized at program inception and stated, "So I don't know that we've been tracking the success rate for very long because I don't think it was done before this last kind of five years." Lana Santisteven continued by stating when leadership changes occurred in program oversight, formal data collection took shape and even changed the feeling of institutional cooperation. "So, then she started to own the data more, and I think that has helped us both feel like this is a true partnership." The change in program leadership appears to have been the catalyst for the creation of formal data collection. Marilyn Masters illustrated how the formal data collection and presentation occurred:

> And so, at that time there was some talk about shifting some things, and things weren't working, and I said, "Well, how do we know they're not working?" And so, when we put that together, we basically said, "What are our questions?" And that's... I mean, it was a one-page overview of where our students are at. And we've just built on that year to year.

Participants elaborated on the importance of program data. Frederickson stated, "I think the more information you have the more opportunities you have to see what's working well and what isn't and then to change what isn't." Other participants commented about how the annual Memorandum of Understanding meeting has helped staff formally review and discuss the data and make intentional change concerning what the numbers portray. Tammy Raymond, however, spoke to the idea that qualitative or anecdotal information about the program is important to consider alongside quantitative data. She stated, "As much as we're data driven, data doesn't always tell the whole story." She explained that often times personnel working directly with students know the stories behind that data and that those stories are a meaningful part of the story. Tammy pointed out that those who do not know the stories may not be fully informed:

> You're not the one working with all of these students on a day to day basis. You're only looking at the data, and again, the data doesn't always tell the story. I know that's again what drives it, but you have to look at some other aspects too.

Jess Polovitch confirmed Tammy's statements concerning the importance of the untold stories behind the data. She stated, "I mean [the data may be] incomplete in the sense that there isn't that anecdotal data". She described further:

> But when I looked at the data and I know that we don't get the full story, and that a was hard part for me because I would hear people say, especially when I first started overseeing it, I would hear a few people who've been in this world for a while say how unsuccessful it was.

The Joint Transition Program has made improvements collecting formal program data and openly discusses it during its annual Memorandum of Understanding meeting and openly discusses ways to improve based of the numbers. It appears that because of the lack of goals, the data in Table 8 has not been able to be used as a vital mechanism to promote improvement. Anecdotal data and other less formalized data seem to be the catalysts for change. For example, when Sandra Fredrickson noted that some students don't respond to the program invitation to join, she did not use formal data to explore needed changes, she simply made changes to improve the process. However, she was not able to show the data-based improvements as they were not tracked pre- and post-initiative. Interview participants offer to add qualitative or anecdotal data to the formal collection process as a way for the program to deepen what it has already created to assure student stories are told and not lost in the numbers.

Measures of Success. Concerning the concept of measures of success, participants commented on the types of data that demonstrate program success or the program's

shortcomings. Marilyn Masters stated, “I think had we started out with specific outcomes for this program, it would've been way easier to measure success because of the leadership transition that did occur.” She reiterated the lack of measures of success from the start of the program but shared how they are in place now. Though formal program data is now collected and reviewed, interview participants expressed that they found it difficult to understand the program’s measures of success. Marine Long explained how the impossibility of data collection from students who do not participate in the program limits the programs understanding of what will indicate a student’s success in the program,

> The hard part, when we talk about success rates, is our data only looks at the students we admit so we can talk about GPA being a really good predictor for success of WSU students but I can't tell you what the best predictor of success is for that population because they don't come here.

Fredrickson further described the difficulty in understanding program effectiveness as related to program mission and the difficulty to measure student experience within the data,

> I guess I would be curious to see how effective is it really or what's happening, or what kind of experience are these students having in the program, and to better to understand is it doing what it's intended to do or do we need to redefine its purpose.

Though measures of success are in place, participants communicated the difficulty of really capturing the essence of how successful the program is through data. Though participants explained those difficulties, suggestions for revisions to existing data were not provided.

Participants spoke to the notion of what success looks like for the program. The formal data reviewed during the annual Memorandum of Understanding meeting outlines the trajectory for each program student, however the mission and vision of the program do not formally state

that students who stay and complete at Caxin Community College or transfer and complete at a different institution are considered success, for example. However, participants detail how they do consider them to be examples of success. Marine Long stated, “I think at first glance somebody could be really disappointed if they were only looking for students graduating [from WSU]. We've all very much deliberately said that might not be success for every student.” Hans Solomon echoed Long’s statements:

> We both [the institutions] decided that completing any college degree is the full measure of success. It's [the program’s goal] really just a college degree. Whether that's through CCC, whether that's through WSU or whether that's transferring to another institution and getting a degree from there. So long as we've created that channel for you to successfully complete what it is that you want to complete, then that's the metric of success.

Though not documented as success in the program’s mission and vision, several participants commented that student success is measured in various ways and does not always mean successfully completing a degree at WSU as the program’s mission details.

Participants disclosed that they have questioned the program’s success and their opinions concerning the program’s success varied. Lana Santisteven stated:

> I remember a meeting where a program staff member had come to me and saying, "What kind of data do you think we should have on this program to really evaluate success, because I don't know if all of these efforts are worth it.

Participants indicated that they weren’t sure if the program was in fact successful. Nancy Iverson, a mid-level WSU staff member, acknowledged, “We would have hoped that the true process of the program in getting them ready for a four-year institution, and then to transfer and be successful, we were not seeing that.” Kaitlin Peterson also shared, “I always kind of struggled

with ethically is like... Are we doing a good job with this? Students just aren't doing well. They're not succeeding." Though participants shared opinions concerning the program's lack of success, others voiced very different perspectives.

Participants also voiced opinions regarding the importance of the program and its success. Jess Polovitch clarified that data demonstrating student success outside the scope of the program mission is testament to that notion. She stated:

> I don't think it's quite as unsuccessful as people think because of the other things, because we didn't have the data of where the students transferred on. So, it looks like because we didn't graduate them, it looks like, I say failure but it's not, but actually it may be the best thing for them.

Tammy Raymond shared Polovitch's idea of the program's success:

> I think what a lot of the data told me was that these were students capable of being successful, they just needed the right support, whether that be someone like me who was just there to listen, whether it was a tutor in a specific subject that just frustrated them, whether it was teaching them good study habits.

Jasmine Brothers also explained that if a student fully commits to the program, they are able to find success. She stated, "I know that there are students that really embrace the program and are very successful at transitioning to WSU full-time."

Though differing opinions exist around what demonstrates the program's measures of success, it is clear that both institutions have committed to a formal data collection and review process which has been instrumental in creating program change. The willingness to openly discuss data and what revisions are needed seems to be a testament to the effort each institution is willing to put forth on behalf of program success.

Theme 5: Program Structure

The Program Structure theme can be defined as the structural and operational processes that define the program. This theme encompasses codes such as student admission, program support services, and student courses. Participants who addressed the theme of data spoke to the evolution of the program's structure, as well as various components that comprise the program's current structure. Participants of primarily mid-level and program oriented functional-levels made reference to this theme. This is an indication that the theme of program structure was not only important to the participants but also that program structure efforts are impacted by and are addressed by such functional levels at each institution.

Student Admission. The primary subcategory under program structure was student admission. According to participant interviews once the two institutional presidents decided to move forward on the idea of creating such a program, admission into the program was the primary objective to tackle before tackling other structural set up. Kaitlin Peterson described WSU's different levels of admission and that the creation of this program created a fourth type of admission. "WSU has many different levels of admission. So full admission, and conditionally admitted, and from my understanding Pathway is like one step above a full denial." Jasmine Brothers laid out the general admission overview students encounter:

> They apply to WSU and WSU either accepts them, denies them, or decides that the student has enough potential that they're going to offer them Pathway. If they're offered Pathway, then it's ultimately because they didn't quite hit some marker for WSU's admission, but they saw some potential in the student, enough to say let's let them try this program and transition them into being a student at a four year school.

Tammy Raymond agreed with Jasmine's remarks and stated, "They weren't quite ready for that four-year institution, but they had that potential to be successful." The notion that these students show potential but do not quite meet the threshold for full admission to the institution places the student in the program with additional support to foster success. Lana Santisteven echoed the idea that the institutions make admission decisions based on the belief that you need this other path to get the skills you need." The admission standards help identify students who might need extra support to continually find academic success. Nancy Iverson pointed out that the institutions took an approach to, "Let's not shut the door on these students if they're not eligible for a four-year institution, what are some options for them."

Marine Long declared that the program has set up its standards for admission with intention, based on what indicators demonstrate future student success. Marine continued, "We haven't ever made an exception and admitted them if they didn't meet the requirements because if they're not meeting the requirements they're probably not prepared yet." Interview participants spoke to a notion that was introduced in the Adaptability theme. They explain that the admission structure has been adapted from offering all denied students the Joint Transition Program to now only a select group who also meet certain GPA and placement score standards. Nancy Iverson stated, "Initially I think we were admitting through the Joint Transition Program, too many students that were at risk." Robert Belvedere reported that the institutions came together to review how they were offering the program to students:

> Okay, let's be a little bit more methodical on who we're offering this to. It shouldn't just go to everybody. This notion that they may not have hit the ACT mark with their class and rank, or high school rank, showed some promise. Or the other way around, they had a high ACT.

Robert's statement captures the essence that the program was looking for some indication of promise from student admits as they changed the admission selection process. Interview participants indicated that collaboration and the review of formal program results were pivotal in making such admission standard changes.

Program Support Services. A secondary sub-category under program structure is program support services. Terry Meier, a mid-level CCC staff member, stated that if the institutions continually focus on student support and remain flexible in serving them in the best ways possible that the program and students will be successful. Terry stated:

> I think that's where we've become more flexible and understanding is, yeah this is a program, and we're both going to reap benefits from it, but again, if we focus back in on the students, and how we can really do that, we can help line them up with a track that makes sense.

The Joint Transition Program provides several services to students as outlined in the program handbook and documented in participant interviews. Services such as, tutoring from both campuses, on-campus housing at WSU, student activities at both institutions, as well as classes and advisors at both institutions. Interview participants explained that program structure can present difficulty when working with a vast array of diverse students in the program. Hans Solomon shared, "We like to think that we're giving individualized care to all these students, but at some point we still have to go by policies and procedures, and that can get kind of frustrating to students." Kat Artson added, "Being able to find out whether or not there's any flexibility will help me to help a lot of students going forward." Interview participants agree that the program support services that are embedded in the program structure are vital to student success and a

fruitful student experience. Some stated that flexibility can pose an issue, but most understand that flexibility can't be granted on an individual student basis.

Transfer Requirements. The final sub-theme is transfer requirements. The program structure outlines how a student is admitted into the program and how they can successfully transition fully to WSU. GPA, specific course completion and an earned 24 credits are the primary items student must complete before transitioning fully to WSU as outlined in the program handbook. Kat Artson disclosed, "The traditional way of them accessing their Bachelor's degree or their four year degree isn't going to look like their peers' necessarily, so what are some other things that we can do where we're kind of thinking outside of the box." Jess Polovitch continued, "The students then have the ability to take classes at CCC and at WSU so they have the ability to have the small class sizes and still get the feel of a WSU type campus." Tammy Raymond affirmed, "The only difference is the majority of their classes are taken across the street at CCC and they're allowed up to two classes per semester at WSU. That rounds out their full credits." Marine Long elaborated on the student course sequence and eventual transition:

> It's very clear the student needs to successfully complete their coursework, their developmental coursework with CCC, and maintain a certain GPA to transition but every student's kind of on a different track doing that and I think there's a perception that some students are held back because they have to wait to hit that milestone before they can transition. We've got a program so you [students] can see what it's like to be here, get up to speed on some of the coursework where we think you might need just a little bit more time and then we'll get you here full time.

Interview participants and documents outlined how course sequence and campus location intentionally and strategically to promote student success. Though students' paths may look different that students admitted directly to WSU, that institutions intentionally advise students through developmental and other preparatory courses to assure success.

Theme 6: Student Success Support

The Student Success Support theme can be defined as the programming and processes that are offered by the institutions to encourage student success. This theme encompasses the most individual codes from the first round of coding than any other theme. Additionally, more concepts are included in this theme than any other. This theme encompasses concepts such as student experience, student advising, student transition, and student barriers. Participants who addressed the theme of student success support spoke to the importance of consistent and cohesive support for students from both institutions as well as challenges program participants present. Participants of all functional-levels made reference to this theme. This is an indication that the theme of student support is a foundational piece of the program, especially as the program's original intent and mission was to offer denied students a guided program to eventually find success at a four-year institution. Program admission was the foundation for the program's structure, however most additional efforts center around student success support.

Student Experience. Interview participants spoke at length about how the program has created a robust student experience for program participants. The Joint Transition Program also allows for additional student experiences for participants outside of formal coursework. Jasmine Brothers specified:

> As a Joint Transition Student, they have access to everything at WSU just as if they were a fully accepted WSU student. They can participate in all the clubs, organizations, they

> live on campus, they eat in the dining halls. For all intents and purposes, nobody can tell the difference between a Joint Transition Program student and a full-time WSU student, other than the fact that they go to CCC for some of their classes. They only thing that they cannot participate in is any NCAA sanctioned sports.

Tammy Raymond added that, "while a student is within the Joint Transition Program, they are still allowed to live on the WSU campus and really have all the amenities that a regular WSU student would have." Robert Belvedere specified that allowing for housing on WSU's campus was important to program participants as CCC doesn't offer on-campus housing. He stated, "That was a big draw. That notion that they get to live on campus. They get an WSU ID card; they get to go to those football games. That's part of that experience. It was a big draw." Despite allowing students the opportunity to fully participate in organizations and programming at both institutions and offering on-campus WSU housing, Jasmine Brothers explained that outside of orientation and registration programming, there aren't other specific programs or activities created for Joint Transition Program Students. "Other than that, we don't have any specific program events for them."

The documents and participant interviews document that the program has intentionally created not only course sequences that will contribute to program participants' success, but that it has also has intentionally built in programming to ensure students can enjoy a full college experience as a part of their program participation. Interview participants provided testimony about how a full student experience is a part of how the institutions support students, their retention and eventual success.

Student Support Services. Interview participants explained how student advising and creating opportunity to build strong relationships with both of their academic advisors has been a

key student support service. Tammy Raymond stated, “I think that's where academic advising across the board in higher ed is missing that personal component, and I think students, especially now, that's what they're looking for.”

Marine Long added:

> The staff understands student development and they understand the students in this program may need a different level of interaction than a student who maybe is starting at WSU. And so, we've got some really talented and gifted people who are fostering those relationships, not only with the students but with CCC and that collaboration.

Kat Artson confirmed, “The support that students are getting in addition to what they would have gotten if they would have come directly here, those additional supports I think have just been really instrumental in students being able to succeed.”

The advising resource center, along with their staff and the collaboration that happens when students participate in the orientation program, make sure that the students are advised into the correct classes and are on the right track and sharing that information back and forth. Marine Long articulated how the program has organized its student advising services. “There's a really nice collaboration happening now with the advising. And it's understanding where students are at, what they're taking, and then really getting to that point where they are prepared to be at WSU and they've successfully transitioned”.

Jess Polovitch affirmed how student advising has evolved to better serve student participants. “They’ve had, and more so even now, they have an advisor at CCC, and they have an advisor at WSU really helping guide the transition.” Hans Solomon assured that academic advisors are very involved in the progress of their advisees, “With the Joint Transition Program, we're [advising] a little bit closer. We're not holding your hand, but we're there for you.”

Interview participants explained how the program has improved its strong foundation of student advising by offering dual advising from both institutions, meaning academic advisors work as a team throughout a student's journey and eventual transition.

Despite the positive change that has been created, student advising has not been exempt from challenges. Though the opportunity exists for students to access strong advising options, that doesn't necessarily mean students take advantage of it. Jess Polovitch stated:

> The one thing that surprised me was some of their unwillingness to talk with their advisor. Even though they had so much contact with that person one on one before because they meet to get their schedule and so it's not a new person.

Along with the perceptions that students are unwilling to talk their advisors, Kaitlin Peterson disclosed that this program and especially working individually with students can be time consuming. She illustrated:

> It takes so much time and resources that if we just did a better job of supporting transfer students, and when I say we, I mean WSU and CCC or other institutions, then we wouldn't have to have this special program that we spend so much time on.

Kaitlin Peterson highlighted that strong institutional supports for transfer students, including advising, could disincentivize the Joint Transition Program but also boost general transfer student success.

Transition. Interview participants spoke at length concerning student transition from CCC to WSU, as well as alternate transition options. The program data qualitatively outlines how students have transitioned through the program since its inception. As documented before and though not documented as a formal part of the program's mission or vision, many interview

participants agree that the program's purpose isn't only to assist student transition from CCC to WSU. Tammy Raymond acknowledged:

> The purpose of the program, in my opinion, was to get you a degree to do what you want to do. If WSU doesn't have that, then let's get you where it is. If WSU isn't the right fit for you, let's find where is.

Jasmine Brothers agreed:

> I think through this process we've learned that it's okay if they don't transition there [to WSU] full-time, it's okay if they come here [to CCC] full-time, and it's okay if they go someplace else. I think that everybody involved has learned over the years that that's okay.

Kaitlin Peterson assured that the program is focused on students finding success and the degree that best suits them, regardless of institution. "They got their footing in the Joint Transition Program and went on and met their goal. It just maybe wasn't through WSU. To conclude, Tammy Raymond reported that all program students follow the same trajectory even though the program is set up to transition students from CCC to WSU. "A successful path doesn't have to be from point a to point b. It can have twists and turns in it and sometimes that makes the experience of achieving that goal even sweeter."

Interview participants spoke to how program supports allow for a smoother transition to a four-year institution. Hans Solomon shared, "They'll be able to bridge that gap a little bit easier rather than just going to any old college." Jasmine Brothers explained that students get the best of both institutional experiences and that the academic support and student experience they desire can ultimately assist in motivating a successful transition. She detailed:

> They want to live on campus. They want to have that big college experience, so this program helps them have that fulfillment of that goal they had, but yet has the class size and things that we've talked about to help them transition into being a full-time college student at a bigger university.

Robert Belvedere spoke at length about how the academic supports of the program ease the transition to a four-year institution. He articulated that, "We are making sure that these students, when they do come, are going to be successful in their sophomore, junior, and senior courses. That they have those skills available, the writing skills and the math skills." Robert Belvedere elaborated on the idea that the program has created the support system for successful transition, but that it is a student's choice to take advantage of them and put in the work to successfully transition. According to Belvedere:

> Students that, if they're willing to put in the work, even though they may have those remedial courses, if they're willing to do it, they can be successful. Given the right resources, these students can be successful. I've seen enough of them get through. But you've got to give them a chance. But I look at the students that I know have gone through it and gotten through and transitioned and been successful here. It's wonderful.

Though participants did not speak much about the challenges students face as they transition from CCC and once they transition full-time to WSU, the process of gaining approval for formal transition was clearly iterated in participant interviews and the program handbook, outlining that after completion of certain program requirements, they would gain approval to fully transition to WSU.

Student Challenges. Interview participants reported that despite the student success support they offered; various challenges remain. Robert Belvedere specified that incoming

students' ambition can pose a challenge. "There's a reason they're below high school or low ACT, some things like that. Oftentimes, they're a tough group to work with. They're not as motivated. They're not as driven." Interview participants explained that there are reasons for which students were denied full admission to WSU and intentional supports have been created to combat such challenges. Hans Solomon detailed a recent cultural challenge that has presented itself to regional institutions. He recounted:

> I think that the demographic in the region is changing quite a bit. Or at least, it's been moving in a different direction because we have a lot of refugees in this area. And English is not their first language, and so a lot of these [high school] counselors by their very nature are very passionate for these students and want to see these students succeed.

The regional influx of refugees has changed the incoming demographic of students to regional institutions and created an additional challenge for institutions to intentionally and culturally respond to serve their specific needs. Additionally, interview participants explained that student challenges have prohibited smooth reregistration and that certain account holds indicate the issue. Robert Belvedere detailed:

> But we did notice that as we got towards registration, that there were, probably, inordinate amount or a higher number of resident's life holds, conduct holds, things like that with program students, trying to fit in and running into issues. They tended to have some more behavioral issues in the dorms.

Marilyn Masters asserted:

> One of them [challenges] that I can think of is some, when you have behavioral issues. And how you navigate that. Or when you have mental health crises, you know, who's

responsible for what? And it really has worked out that everyone's taken responsibility for that.

Marilyn Masters confirmed that conduct and behavioral challenges with program students have arisen and that both institutions have collaboratively worked to assist students presenting such challenges.

Summary

The six recurring themes emerging from the data about the creation and improvement of vertical transfer programming were: Institutional Commitment, Adaptability, Communication, Data, Program Structure, and Student Success Support. The theme of Institutional Commitment theme highlighted the institutions' need for buy-in, collaboration and willingness to meet and exceed the program's agreed upon mission and vision. Adaptability highlighted the need for institutions to change and adapt the program for the purpose of improvement or necessity. The Communication theme drew attention to the need for internal and external communication about the program by both institutions, while the Data theme surrounded the notion of the collection and use of formal data by both institutions. The theme of Program Structure promoted the definition of structural and operational processes whereas the Student Success Support theme promoted defined programming and processes to encourage student success.

The six themes emerging from the data concerning the vertical transfer program between CCC and WSU uncovered the program's strengths, but also the challenges the program has faced. Though many of the challenges have provided an opportunity for program growth and improvement, participants outlined remaining challenges. Participants agreed to a majority of the shared points, however participants tended to disagree when discussing the success of the program. These themes were essential to the creation and improvement of this case study. A

detailed discussion of these themes as they relate to the research questions is provided in the next chapter. Conclusions and recommendations are also included in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions

Student transfer has been a topic of discussion and concern since the inception of the community college system. Community colleges play a critical role in preparing students for attaining a bachelor's degree after transfer to a four-year institution (Boggs, 2011). Many students enter the community college with the intent to transfer to a four-year institution; however, few of these students realize this goal (Handel, 2012). Much of the existing transfer literature focuses on the student experience in the transfer process; less examined is how institutions create and improve vertical transfer programming. The purpose of this case study was to understand and analyze the creation and improvement of vertical transfer student programming using Deming's Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle (The W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017). This study explored how vertical transfer programming addresses vertical transfer student transition challenges by investigating the creation and improvement of a vertical transfer student program between a public two-year college and a large, public four-year research university in the Midwest region of the United States. The research was guided by one primary research question: How does a public, two-year college and a large, public, four-year research university in the Midwest region of the United States create and improve vertical transfer student transfer programming to prepare students for vertical transfer transitions?

In Chapter 5, I provide a summary of key findings that emerged from the research question. I used case study research design and analysis to provide an interpretation of what the participants' responses mean in regard to the research question and broader literature. Then I

describe the limitations and discuss the implications for the practice of program development, make several recommendations for practice and future research. Finally, I summarize my research findings and the totality of my research experience.

Summary of Findings

The results of the present study shaped six major themes in respect to the research question. The six major themes that emerged from the data were institutional commitment, program structure, program communication, program data, adaptability, and student success support. The themes emerged from three levels of data analysis described in Chapter 4 and are summarized in the following sections.

Theme 1: Institutional Commitment

Concerning the theme of Institutional Commitment, interview participants explained that presidential suggestion and their desire to improve transfer between the institutions was truly the catalyst for this vertical transfer program. They commented how top-down support for the program was vital, specifically in the program's infancy; however, staff buy-in, the involvement of relevant stakeholders, and the ongoing commitment and development of the partnership was even more critical so important process details were not overlooked for successful program deployment and continuation.

Interview participants stated that strong collaboration and a willingness to improve the program among partners has played a key role in assuring the viability of the program. They also expressed that building the program's culture has taken time and that time has been a key element in fostering the program's initial foundation to create the program's culture. Staff expressed concern that partnership programs are both people and time intense and require dedication even if results do not match desired outcomes. Staff described both institutions'

dedication to the program's mission and to serving the needs of regional transfer students. What this indicates for vertical transfer programs is that a strong top-down foundation is vital to a dynamic creation. Developing a mission is essential to set the tone for the program and involving key employees in the program is vital to assure a strong process is created relevant to the involved institutions.

Theme 2: Adaptability

Adaptability was a core theme as interview participants spoke at length about how both partners' willingness to adapt has been vital to the program's viability. Internal and external factors have challenged the program. External factors like state budget cuts resulting in reductions in force, and internal changes like leadership transitions have proven challenging yet rewarding to the program, according to interview participants. New leadership was able to lend a fresh perspective to the program and restructure how it tracks data. Also, reductions in force involved new staff in program processes and helped redefine how student communications processes were managed, which led to additional touch points and a more interactive communication process. Interview participants indicated that problem-solving and flexibility have been key to program success. For institutions looking to create or improve a vertical transfer program, knowing that external and internal challenges may come about, creating a culture of collaboration and adaptability will lend itself well to program viability. Institutions could also consider analyzing possible threats to the program's viability as a means to anticipate solutions or ways in which it can be flexible.

Theme 3: Communication

While discussing the theme of Communication, interview participants stated that creating formal and informal communication methods between institutional partners is key to assure

issues are addressed quickly. In this study, the annual meeting was important to assure all issues can be formally addressed with key participants in the room. They also stated that informal, ongoing communication methods allow for day-to-day follow-up, which is key for student success. Participants indicated the need to be heard and that listening to all levels of involved staff is critical as certain positions have different duties, differing levels of student interaction and perspective. Staff also commented that more recent changes to student communications have ensured expedited follow-up and improved program education for prospective students. Data has shown that more students have accepted their offer into the program and staff believe that improved communications have played a part. Institutions wishing to develop a vertical transfer program should look to assure internal staff communication has both informal and formal feedback methods to assure issues can be addressed expeditiously and with transparency. Additionally, student-related communications should be mapped to assure communications are consistent, informational, precise and use various methods deemed effective by students.

Theme 4: Data

A majority of the study participants were aware of the program's tracked data, as it was a common annual meeting agenda item. However, participants spoke to the notion that disseminating data beyond the core group of program staff could be useful for information and feedback proposes. The lack of goal creation and goal data was criticized by interview participants. Participants stated that the creation of vertical transfer program goals could assist in assessing program success and also help focus strategic initiatives to move goals forward. Study participants expressed concern that current data may not comprehensively capture student experiences and that both qualitative and quantitative data should be included to demonstrate program success, program shortcomings and capture student experiences. One interview

participant stated that "student success may not be reflected in program success," capturing the need to define program goals and relay student experiences to assure student perspectives are documented. A vertical transfer program should create initial quantitative and qualitative data to track, create program goals and assure that student perspectives are captured in a measurable method.

Theme 5: Program Structure

Study participants stated that one of the most important steps in creating a vertical transfer program, aside from its initial inception, is creating the program's structure. Mapping out the initial process for this program helped to create common language, definitions, and identify how students move through the program. Participants stated that creating and documenting how the program is supposed to work helps define roles and responsibilities for staff and it also helps to identify deficiencies or weak points.

The key idea of creating workflow processes has been a vital piece to program improvement, has helped new staff understand the program, and helped for communicating how the program works to prospective students. Assuring that all program staff understand the "how" and "why" of the program has been important and some interview participants showed concern for not understanding the history or original intent of the program. Participants stated that with additional communication and clarity regarding the initial purpose and history of the program, they might be able to lend more insight into how to improve the program's structure. What this indicated for a vertical transfer program is that creating a clear workflow of the program's structure will assist staff in understanding its purpose, lend insight to weak points, and help communicating how the process is to be experienced students.

Theme 6: Student Success Support

The creation of the partnership Memorandum of Understanding and annual meetings was pivotal in creating program culture and reminding program staff about the program's mission to serve students. Assuring strong student support from a student's first steps into the program have been a focus for this program. Interview participants explained that well-trained staff and personally assigned advisors have helped individualize and connect students to the support they need to succeed in the program.

Allowing for flexibility to individualize or tailor support to fit an individual student is also important to student success. Addressing the challenge to provide individual support for special student populations, for example those with disabilities or new Americans, can require staff to solicit specialized resource support that are not most commonly offered through the Joint Transition Program. Staff knowledge about access to unique or specialized resources is essential while addressing individual student challenges.

Participants described how student driven solutions are key to the program and student success. For example, they listened to how students wanted a campus experience and created a housing arrangement so that Joint Transition Program students could live in Willis State University housing. They showed concern, however, for the social integration of students in the program. Though on campus housing, student organization, and activity participation is offered, interview participants explained that formal program-specific social events or supports were not a part of the program. Integrated social supports can encourage student retention and completion.

Additionally, minimal student feedback or focus groups were conducted to learn about support needs from a student perspective. Student feedback is solicited during registration events, however feedback about additional program aspects has not been gathered. Though the

program offers strong student support, understanding what students find important may assist in creating new or improving existing support opportunities.

Summarizing the present study's results provides insight into how participants felt and believed the program was impacting students and the institutions. The following section discusses the study's connection to previous literature and highlights this study's contributions.

Discussion

Discussion of the results in response to the research question outline how study findings relate the literature as well as how the chosen framework's application relates to the study.

Relation to Literature

Many of the findings from this study relate to what was outlined in previous literature and research. Additionally, this study addressed many suggestions listed in previous research. Previous literature describes how transfer programming is typically designed to respond to challenges to create improvements or strategic outcomes for institutions as well as students (Fisher, Demetriou, & Hall, 2013; Harper-Marinick & Swarthout, 2012; Valdes, Albury, Mahmood, & Merine, 2012). Zeroing in on how community college students prepare for transfer and how institutions provide meaningful support to transfer-interested students, has allowed for deep exploration of how such services promote successful student transfer. This discussion has been organized into four primary categories: strategic enrollment, transfer outcomes, transfer efficiencies and forming connections.

Strategic Enrollment. Strong support from top leadership was a key factor in this program's initiation and continuance. Using strengths of both institutions and creating a strong working relationship to better serve students solidified the program's creation. The program was established to create opportunity for individuals to come to the state, especially those who may

not have been able to enter directly into a four-year institution but aspired to. Essentially, the program was created as a means to improve the institutions' strategic enrollment initiatives. Creating a strong sense of purpose was vital to establishing the program and also led to stakeholder buy-in.

This study supports the current literature's call for institutions to explore the strategic commitment to enroll and serve community college transfer students through interinstitutional partnerships (The College Board, 2011), as well as the need to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the movements involved with student enrollment, in order to design appropriate policies and programs to help transfer students meet their educational goals (Borden, 2004; Friedel & Wilson, 2015; Hannenmann & Hazenbush, 2014; Marling, 2013). Designing policies and programs to support students' educational goals has also improved enrollment and diversified institutional enrollment profiles, specifically the four-year transfer-in institution. As the Aspen Institute's Transfer Playbook (Wyner, Deane, Jenkins, & Fink, 2016) describes, "Colleges increasingly rely on transfer as a means to enroll students from their traditional, college-age markets and meet their diversity goals" (p.1).

Previous literature speaks to integrating transfer students as part of a greater, established strategic enrollment plan (Wyner, Deane, Jenkins, & Fink, 2016). The two institutions in this study did so in a manner that was feasible and fitting to them, their region, and their budgets. Unique aspects of any partner program can create distinct conditions for a program. For example, the geographic proximity and being a part of the same state university system have allowed this program to have face-to-face course sharing, shared housing arrangement and expeditious technology systems that other program may not be able to take advantage of give their conditions. Interestingly, the Joint Transition Program institutions incorporated transfer students

and their four-year goals into their strategic enrollment plan despite any additional offers of compensation or incentive for such an endeavor. Though many other states have performance funding that incentivizes completion, other states do incentivize or at least incorporate student transfer into their performance funding models (Li, 2019). The Joint Transition Program created their program for the purpose of improving institutional and student success.

Earlier literature outlines the importance of creating a strategic enrollment plan inclusive of transfer students (The College Board, 2011); however much of the "how-to" is often left out. The Aspen Institute's Transfer Playbook (Wyner, Deane, Jenkins, & Fink, 2016) is the most comprehensive document outlining how institutions can improve student transfer and connects with many points observed in the Joint Transition Program, like the notion of dedicating significant resources to support transfer students. However, additional information on how institutions are creating programming could be beneficial, despite a few featured institutions providing details. The Aspen Institute's Transfer Playbook (Wyner, Deane, Jenkins, & Fink, 2016) describes various funding sources institutions have used to support transfer student initiatives. The Joint Transfer Program institutions, even when faced with budget decreases, didn't seek external funds.

This study outlines how two institutions built a unique, strategic transfer program, supporting the literature by demonstrating that a one-size-fits all vertical transfer programming model is impossible for all institutions. This program used the academic offerings, close physical proximity and shared system to create efficiencies. Creating this program allowed the institutions to strategically target a new population of student for enrollment and promote eventual transfer between the institutions, while taking into account the unique nature of the institutions and their partnership.

Transfer Outcomes. As the Joint Transition Program presidents discussed the program's origins, interview participants expressed that the presidents understood the need to customize and produce a specific program to assist students through the transfer process specifically to improve transfer outcomes. The presidents acknowledged the untapped opportunity for transfer among the institutions and the opportunity it could afford students in the region. Like the National Student Clearinghouse's Tracking Transfer report (2017) outlines, the Joint Transition Program institutions customized their program and policies according to the mutually established transfer goals. The Joint Transition Program presidents created a new goal of improving transfer outcomes for students in their region and requested that designated staff design the program to support that. The goals of the Joint Transition Program assured that student learning goals, for example how to transition to a university successfully, were imbedded and taught as a student moved throughout this program.

Joint Transition Program staff involved in the program's creation and current endeavors recognize how two-year institutions welcome students of diverse backgrounds, and that they play a critical role in increasing national degree completion. Previous studies (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; NCPPHE, 2011) also revealed that although many first-time two-year college students indicate completing a bachelor's degree as a goal, few students who start at a two-year institution with aspirations of transferring, realize the goal of bachelor's degree attainment. As Cejda and Kaylor (2001) and Jenkins and Fink (2015) illustrate, students who transfer to a four-year institution before obtaining an associate degree are less likely to earn a bachelor's degree. The Joint Transition Program created requirements for students before they were officially allowed to transition to Willis State University. The program does not require a student to complete a full associate's before transitioning; however, it has built

into its academic requirements to promote successful transfer and completion outcomes. Essentially one year of successful completed credits, typically about 24 credits, is required for approved transition. Though limited research exists regarding transfer before an earned associate's degree, the Joint Transition Program created their policies under the premise that students would successfully complete their math and English requirements prior to transfer, which they deemed as important to successful transition.

Joint Transition Program presidents understood that without the creation of a targeted program, it was unlikely that student transfer would improve on its own. the Joint Transition Program recognized the inefficiencies of the transfer process and looked to implement policies and programming aimed at encouraging transfer outcomes improvement. Creating clear transfer outcomes and initiatives to support the designated goals, as outlined in the Aspen Institute's Transfer Playbook (Wyner, Deane, Jenkins, & Fink, 2016), were keys to assuring students were appropriately resourced and support throughout their transition. Not only institutions, but also state or regional compacts are leaders in creating solutions to student transfer challenges and this study could serve to benefit their endeavors, as well.

Interview participants described how the program can be resource and time intense. However, knowing top leadership's commitment to transfer outcomes and the impact successful transfer can have for students, the institutions have committed to and continued the program for several years. As Goldrick-Rab and Roksa (2008) state, improving transfer success can create broader sweeping positive economic and social impacts of a more educated population. The Joint Transfer Program institutions understand these notions and use this as a factor to keep the program going despite lower than desired transfer success numbers. Defining desired transfer outcomes is critical for the development of strong support strategies, however, understanding

larger sweeping impacts, especially those for students and larger community should also be taken into account when creating strategies to support transfer program outcomes.

Transfer Efficiencies. The Joint Transfer Program institutions' presidents wanted to create a program to assist students in achieving their goal to obtain a four-year degree. They understood the student population they wanted to target did not have the academic background to access a four-year institution at the beginning of their higher education careers. Students who begin at community colleges comparison to students who start as freshman at four-year institutions and without the resources to decipher the transfer process, moving between institutions can be daunting to the point of discouraging persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Fann, 2013). The program assessed the challenges that these students faced and created programmatic strategies such as preparatory academic classes and dual advising structures and to assist their transition.

Previous literature details how little is known about the transfer student transition experience and that additional research is needed concerning effective practices designed to address the needs of transfer students and examine the characteristics of successful inter-institutional partnerships (Chrystal, Gansemer-Topf, & Laanan, 2013; Townsend, 2006). To self-evaluate its internal practices, the Joint Transfer Program annually reviews its program to allow for continual efficiency review and improvement implementation. Though the Joint Transition Program was not evaluating itself in comparison to other programs across the nation, the program seeks to understand what challenges students or holds up a smooth student transition, which is key to creating successful programming.

The Joint Transition Program understood the importance of assuring the transfer of credits for students. As Grites and McDonald (2012) and Doyle (2006) point out, the acceptance

of credits hours is a key to a student's transfer success. The Joint Transition Program not only assures courses will contribute toward the four-year degree; they also allow for enrollment at both institutions to give students the experience of classes at the four-year institution before full transition. Furthermore, the Joint Transfer Program took both academic and social student barriers into consideration and looked at how they could break them down and provide support. The integrated housing, student organization and activity possibilities at both institutions facilitates the non-academic transition that Grites and McDonald (2012) attribute to playing a critical role in continuing education beyond a two-year institution. The Joint Transition Program has created socialization opportunities to compliment academic efficiencies in the student transition process.

Forming Connections. Joint Transition Program staff expressed ideas that were presented in Townsend's (2006, 2008) research that described how transfer students not only experience more academic turbulence but also more challenges to social integration than students who do not transfer. Townsend (2006) and study participants noted how the lack of social engagement weakens a student's chance for success. The Joint Transition Program staff agreed to allow students to live on Willis State University's campus for integration into student housing and campus life. Additionally, they allowed students to participate in both institutions' student organizations and activities. The program aligns with Swail's (2004) research that states that by providing social opportunities for students to forge new friendships supports learning and human development, by integrating students into the campus environment. Joint Transition Program staff noted how making students feel welcomed and a part of both campuses was important to their program's set up. The program does not, however, require any organization participation or activity attendance, which could promote social interactions.

In addition to creating opportunity for social interactions, the Joint Transition Program created formal means for students to create connections with advisors and mentors. The Joint Transition Program assigns students an advisor from each institution as well as delivers a mandatory orientation class. The Joint Transition Program has instilled vital non-academic integration elements that support evidence (Booth et al., 2013, Horn & Skomsvold, 2011; Nora & Rendón, 1990; Wang, 2012) that states strategic social supports delivered outside the classroom are positively linked to students' likelihood for transfer and completion.

Relation to Theory

The Deming PDSA Cycle (Plan-Do-Study-Act) process of continual improvement was utilized as a framework for the study's focus and design. It focuses on the stages of a process's creation and improvement and is a useful model for improving a process or carrying out change. Although the Deming PDSA Cycle was initially conceptualized for use in business settings, this model has been suggested for use in higher education (Bonser, 1992). The framework provided a systematic means to review and evaluate the Joint Transition Program from creation through improvement.

While interview participants were not asked specifically about how they viewed their vertical transfer program in regard to the Deming PDSA Cycle, open-ended interview questions inspired by the Deming PDSA Cycle provided insight to understand how they created and improved their vertical transfer program, and even uncovered where they felt they fell short. This framework helped shape interview questions that provoked participants to reflect on the process's four stages of processes creation, implementation, evaluation, and improvement (The W. Edwards Deming Institute, 2017). Participants delved into how their program reacted during each phase. There were moments throughout the interviews where specific individuals did not

have expertise regarding certain parts of the process, as it was out of their scope of work. There were also times where specific individuals acknowledged that the program hadn't thoroughly explored a certain part of the PDSA Cycle.

Because the framework is founded upon a creation and continuous improvement cycles, the interview questions created using this framework prompted interview participants to address their current engagement with the vertical transfer program as well as how they had engaged with it during its creation and past implemented improvements. Interview participants were able to express their reservations about the vertical transfer program, share what could be done better to assist students with transfer, and identify what has worked well. The use of PDSA-founded interview questions prompted interview participants to reflect on their past and current experiences with the Joint Transition Program. The interview process created a scenario that allowed participants to analyze the data, study the results and reflect on what has been learned, essentially creating the study portion of the PDSA framework. Therefore, practitioners can use the Deming PDSA Cycle to investigate how institutions create and improve vertical transfer programming, as well as how they determine and enhance or develop the support needed to increase student transfer from two to four-year institutions.

The PDSA Cycle was useful for investigating the Joint Transition Program as it helped examine the creation and improvement steps of the Joint Transfer Program. However, the PDSA Cycle, which is essentially a process of stages, may have helped describe the process rather than explain how and why things were happening in the program. A more traditional or theoretical framework could have helped better explain the how and why related questions in this study. If chosen for use in future studies, the PDSA Cycle of continual improvement could fall short in the investigation of how other programs develop. The PDSA Cycle assumes that programs work

through a creation and improvement process, when it may be possible that some do not follow those sequential steps. Though the findings from this study suggest that an improvement process helps to strengthen and enhance a program, it is not certain that all programs cyclically undergo improvement processes. For example, vertical transfer programs could originate as directives or grant funded processes with little room for input, improvement or flexibility.

Solely employing the PDSA Cycle framework instead of using it in conjunction with another theory could have limited the understanding of the Joint Transfer Program. Use or incorporation of a theory could have more profoundly exposed how and why certain things were taking place within the program. Investigating other vertical transfer program creation and improvement processes could be well-served by employing frameworks originating from change or motivation theories. For example, Ryan and Deci's (2017) self-determination theory of motivation could help researchers explore how program staff initiate transfer programs and implement change or improvements from an incentive or motivational viewpoint. Self-determination theory of motivation proposed that behavior is primarily motivated by an individual's intrinsic motivation, as well by extrinsic motives that become personally endorsed (Ryan & Deci, 1985). Since goals often serve as an external incentive that helps activate particular behaviors (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2011), future studies could address how intrinsic and external motivation play into program initiation and improvement. Employing a theory like the self-determination theory of motivation could provide for a stronger way in which to analyze program creation and staff commitment to goal achievement in institutions of higher education.

Using the Deming PDSA Cycle provided a strong foundation to examine the Joint Transition Program. The framework assisted in producing useful and insightful participant

responses that add to the existing literature regarding vertical student transfer. Incorporation of a theory could further advance the understanding of how vertical transfer programming attributes to vertical student transfer.

Interdependency of Themes

The interdependency of the themes in this study is depicted in Figure 5. The themes that that developed throughout this study are all interdependent on one another and were vital to the creation and improvement of this student-related partnership program. Though the themes were not necessarily sequential, it is clear that the heart of what allowed this partnership program to come to fruition was Institutional Commitment. Each of the themes is connected as they have a direct impact on one another, though it is important to note that the strength of the Institutional Commitment supports the themes connected to it.

Though these themes originated from a vertical transfer student program, it is possible its reach and usefulness could reach beyond the bounds of vertical transfer student programs and to student-related partnership programs in general. These themes depicted through their interconnected could serve as a framework or model for partnership program creation, development, improvement and success. The themes encompass critical pieces of creating a partnership and depict how their interconnectedness are important as foundational pieces of a student-related partnership program.

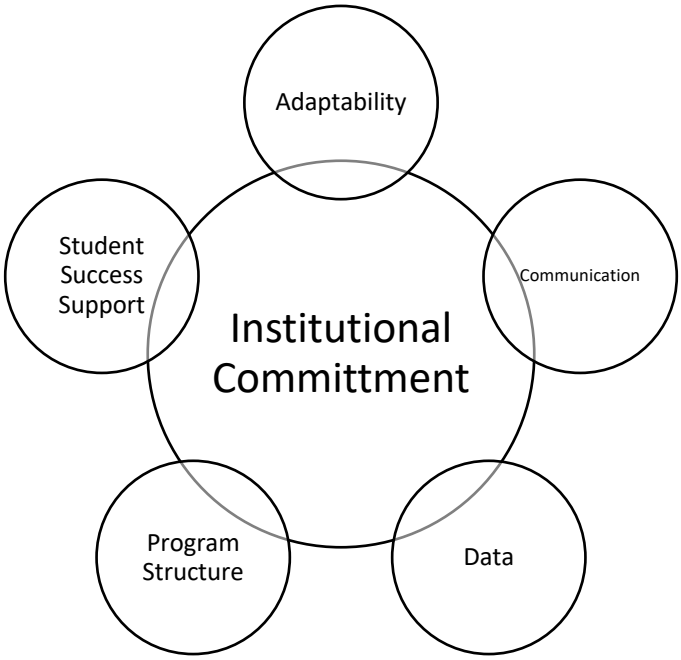

Figure 4. Interdependency of Themes Framework.

Recommendations

This study has the ability to impact how community colleges develop vertical transfer programming that promotes increases in transfer completion. Increasing the number of students moving out of the community college to the four-year institution promotes the needed change of increasing transfer rates to subsequently move students to bachelor's degree attainment (Miller & Erisman, 2011; NCPPHE, 2011). An increase of transfer students seeking to obtain a bachelor's degree aligns with the work of prominent organizations, like the Lumina Foundation, to increase the number of citizens with an academic credential in order to have a healthy supply of employees for future market needs and demands (Lumina Foundation, 2017).

The research findings from the present study identified themes that support improving student transfer from the two-year institution for bachelor's degree completion. Kates (2010) acknowledged the value that student voices bring to the study of student transfer; however, this study unveiled how institutions approach transfer programming. Therefore, the findings from the

present study are valuable in understanding, though from a limited perspective, how institutions prepare students for the transition to a four-year institution. Equally, from the interview participants' perspective, they contended that the institutional planning and ongoing commitment that made transfer a priority was important to truly help students realize transfer success and bachelor's degree completion.

This study serves as a foundation to support increased transfer to four-year institutions by understanding how institutions create vertical transfer programming to assist student for transition to four-year institutions. Two- and four-year institutions can use this study to develop or enhance programming and services for transfer-interested students to promote transfer success. The recommendations for future practice and research are outlined based on the findings from the present study.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Four recommendations for future practice emerged from the current study. The four recommendations for future practice are developing a transfer culture, developing institutional partnerships, training employees and incentivizing transfer. By implementing these recommendations, institutions can positively impact student transfer.

Develop a transfer culture. The first recommendation for future practice is for institutions to develop a transfer culture through strategic institutional planning that includes transfer success goals. This study revealed a long-standing transfer culture including annual planning sessions, data collection, and review. However, interview participants stated that transfer goals had not been created and that the lack of goal's weakened transfer strategy creation. Interview participants also stated that success data is tracked for students who transfer outside of the program institutions. Though not a goal of the program, it tracks and shows the

program's commitment to overall transfer. Strategic institutional transfer plans should incorporate targets with multiple pathways for transfer through two-year, four-year, and alternate pathway completion. Creating a clear, strategic plan with strategic transfer initiatives can help an institution understand where it is and where it wants to be regarding transfer. Using transfer data to create goals helps develop benchmarks and targets.

Given the national spotlight for institutions to double current graduation rates and that many community college students wish to transfer to complete a bachelor's degree, policymakers note community colleges' vital role in bachelor's degree attainment (Mourad & Hong, 2011; NCPPHE, 2011). The United States must increase effective transfer routes from the community college to improve bachelor's degree completion.

Develop institutional partnerships. The second recommendation for future practice is for institutions to develop active, collaborative two- and four-year institutional partnerships. Interview participants stated that one of primary factors for their vertical transfer program's success was the strong, supportive partnership that was created between the two institutions. Not only is a strong supportive partnership vital to a program's initiation, but so is the leadership support. Participants described how both institutions' presidents were very involved in the creation of the program and supported the required steps to develop the vertical transfer program and its continuance. The participants described an engaged, collaborative process from both partners that was supported by both formal and informal communication and work processes. Engaging knowledgeable and passionate employees in the development of a vertical has also allowed the program in this study to communicate openly and easily suggest improvements and changes.

Scholars have argued that to significantly increase transfer and baccalaureate attainment, institutions must move beyond articulation agreements and actively collaborate with partner institutions (Case, 1999; Chatman, 2001; DiMaria, 1998). Partnerships can be time and human resource intense to create and maintain. Important factors in creating and sustaining 2- to 4-year transfer partnerships can include previous relationships between institutions, the significance of presidential support for the partnership, and adequate and sustained funding (Kisker, 2007). Though significant effort is required to create and maintain successful partnerships, Kisker (2007) notes that such partnerships can raise students' awareness of the opportunities available to them after community college, can assist in marketing and public relations efforts, and can help create a culture of transfer on community college campuses. Publicizing vertical transfer programs also allows the larger community to understand the partnership, the economic impact of two- and four-year graduates, helps build program awareness, promotes partnership opportunities and provides opportunities for students to connect through the program.

Employee training. The third recommendation for future practice is for institutions to clearly define the duties and train employees involved in the transfer program. Participants in the present study stated how helpful it was, when working with a student, to know who they needed to contact at the partner institution and know that they were skilled and kind. Participants were well informed of who oversaw particular aspects of the program for student resourcing purposes. Though position descriptions were provided as a part of the study's document analysis, how employees were trained for their roles or duties was not discussed. Training transfer staff assures actions align with a program's transfer expectations and supports student success. Assuring standardized, program training will grow program culture and how students are regarded in the

transfer process. Equally, clearly defining transfer staff positions so that roles and responsibilities align with transfer expectations will support transfer success.

Townsend and Wilson (2006) learned that students need more assistance to smoothly transition to four-year institutions. Students from previous studies expressed frustration with advisors who did not understand the transfer process, leaving them to feel like they were on their own to prepare for the transition (Ellis, 2013; Flaga, 2006; Gard et al., 2012; Kiino, 2013; Townsend & Wilson, 2006). Ill-prepared transfer staff frustrate students and hinder timely transfer and result in additional course and cost requirements.

Given the positive influence transfer staff have preparing students for transfer (Dowd et al., 2013; Packard et al., 2013), administrators must ensure advisors are knowledgeable about the process to help prepare students for transfer (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Ellis, 2013). Assuring that transfer staff are aware of their role and responsibilities can help them understand how they can impact transfer success and inform them how to best resource students. Additionally, Kisker's (2007) study outlines the importance of involving faculty in transfer efforts. Faculty's front line, day-to-day contact with students positions them to positively influence transfer but training them is vital to their impact. Specifically, developing faculty responsibilities related to transfer is important given their close workings with students. Outlining staff and faculty expectations related to transfer can create shared responsibility, buy-in and demystify how individual roles are to support transfer.

Incentivize transfer. The fourth recommendation for future practice is for institutions to work with policy makers to incentivize for transfer. The current study was encouraged by institutional presidents; however, no external incentivization, whether it be monetary or external recognition was a part of the program's creation. Incentivizing transfer bring commitment to

successful student transfer, bachelor's degree attainment, and the improved economic impact because of an educated workforce.

The last decade saw a resurgence in performance funding policies for public higher education**.** These policies typically use a formula to tie state appropriations to institutions of higher education based on outcomes rather than enrollments (Dougherty & Reddy, 2013). The goal of these policies is to improve student retention and completion. The theory of these policies is that by placing funds at stake, institutions will be motivated to revamp internal operations, such as student support services and teaching practices that facilitate graduation (Dougherty et al., 2013).

Though many states financially incentivize institutions of higher education to improve graduation rates, little financial incentive exists improve transfer. Positively impacting student transfer can create great economic benefits and promote individual student success. Policymakers and institutions can deepen institutions' transfer commitment by incentivizing transfer.

The recommendations for future practice for this study emphasize the need to understand the complexity of factors that impact student transfer at any given institution, recognize that a variety of perceptions can exist regarding student transfer, and address barriers to student transfer at multiple levels of influence, including at the individual and institutional levels.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study are those characteristics of design or methodology that impact or influence the interpretation of the findings from the research (Price & Murnan, 2004). First, this study only selected individuals who worked within one of the two selected institutions. Though this study sought to understand the creation and improvement of the program from a

staff perspective, allowing student perspective or other individuals close to the program could have broadened perspective. Participants' personal attributes or knowledge could have impacted study findings. For example, the participants' knowledge of the subject matter, expertise within their professional field, values, culture, ethics, etc. may have limited the depth with which they were able to respond or elaborate on their experiences and the program. Also, participants' length of employment and content expertise may have impacted findings. Some of the participants in this study were fairly new to their positions, so their experience, professional preparation and understanding of the concepts related to transfer programming may have been limited. Furthermore, reductions in force may have also limited capturing historical knowledge and perceptions.

Additionally, the interview participant's comfortability with confidentiality may have limited participants wish to openly express ideas regarding the program. For example, one participant openly expressed concerns with confidentiality. She agreed to participate, however, her responses may have been limited to assure they were not identifiable. A further limitation could be the time between the actual experience and the participants request to recall the information. Participants were asked to recall information about the start of this program, which started over ten years prior to this study. Some participants may not accurately recall their original impressions and understandings because of the time difference between their initial experience to the collection of their impressions for this study. Finally, though the generalizability of findings is not the goal of qualitative research, it is worth mentioning that this case study's results would not be generalizable.

Recommendations for Further Research

As illustrated by the review of literature, no studies have explored how institutions create and improve vertical transfer programming. Given the lack of extant research on how institutions create and improve vertical transfer programming, the use of a qualitative method could have been beneficial for exploring a phenomenon where little was known (Kumar, 2014). However, the review of the literature unveiled vast differences in types of existing vertical transfer programs, therefore the use of a qualitative method to investigate one program was deemed most appropriate to gain a better sense of how one program had lived out the creation and improvement process. Future researchers can use the current study to further expand the knowledge base on student transfer. Specifically, the findings from the current study open the door for future researchers to further explore how other institutions create and improve vertical transfer programming, as well as its effect on student transfer.

Recommendations for future research were determined based on the findings from the present study. The recommendations invite additional explorations to expand the knowledge base and allow for more profound examinations of how transfer programming can impact successful student transfer.

Evaluate transfer goal effects. A primary recommendation would be to evaluate how the creation of a transfer goal effects the rate of transfer from the 2- to the 4-year institution. Researchers could evaluate the influence of strategic planning with a goal of transfer success on institutional transfer rates. Though thorough data was tracked, interview participants from this study disclosed that there weren't established program goals concerning transfer to the four-year institution. Investigating how transfer goals and corresponding strategic action influences transfer rates is recommended for future research.

Explore faculty influence on transfer. Second, it is recommended to explore the influence of faculty engagement on transfer success. New research could address the influence faculty engagement has on student transfer success. Interview participants from this study stated that faculty have little to no role in the creation and improvement of their transfer programming. Involving faculty in the program improvement processes, as well as understanding how faculty can best support transfer student needs is recommended for future research.

Examine developmental education's transfer impact. Interview participants shared that all of the students in this vertical transfer program enter the without academic preparation to enter directly to the 4-year institution and noted that a majority of students participate in developmental education. Given participants from the current study discussed the lack of incoming student academic preparation and the high proportion of those enrolled in developmental education, a study on developmental education and transfer student success could be beneficial to the current literature on student transfer. Understanding how participation and success in developmental education influences transfer success may inform how institutions improve such courses and transfer program resources.

Include student perspectives. While this study explored how institutions create and improve transfer programming, studying the perspectives of students who did not successfully transfer may reveal additional information regarding support needs to realize transfer-related educational goals. Investigation of what hinders students from completing the transfer process may inform admission processes and support resources. Much of the current literature related to student transfer from a student perspective is limited to the perspectives of students who did successfully transfer. It may be of value to explore how to effectively capture the perspectives of students who did not persist to better understand what hindered their success. Understanding the

reasons for unsuccessful persistence may further assist the strategic planning and improvement processes for vertical transfer programming.

Conduct qualitative research. Finally, it is recommended to conduct a qualitative study regarding how institutions create and improve vertical transfer programming. This case study has taken an in-depth view of one program; however, the study of multiple like-programs may reveal a larger pool of perspectives to compare as well as uncover additional best practices concerning transfer success. Furthermore, a qualitative study from the student perspective that inquires what hinders them from completing the transfer process would provide a deeper investigation to enhance the development of support services to transfer-interested students. Finally, researchers could consider conducting a comprehensive longitudinal study that evaluates transfer-interested students, their journey through a transfer program to transfer completion, and ultimate bachelor's degree attainment. A longitudinal study could not only assist with understanding how to better support students at the community college but the longitudinal nature of such a study of following a student over the course of their transfer path could also inform the institutional partnership and transfer program improvement process to better ensure transfer and degree completion.

Summary

Two-year institutions are a vital part of the United States' higher education system as they provide access to higher education for a diverse range of students. Current data indicates that the number of students who enter a two-year institution with ambitions of earning a bachelor's degree are very low. It is time for institutions to create meaningful pathways for students to find success for transfer from a 2-year to a 4-year institution.

While creating vertical transfer programming, institutions should include vital components to promote student transfer success. Institutions must create formal and informal opportunity for students to form connections with others as strategic social supports delivered outside the classroom are positively linked to students' likelihood for transfer and completion. Institutions must create transfer efficiencies for students to decipher the transfer process, as moving between institutions can be daunting to the point of discouraging persistence. Institutions must engage in strategic enrollment strategies to enroll and serve community college transfer students through interinstitutional partnerships in order to design appropriate policies and programs to help transfer students meet their educational goals. Finally, institutions must customize and produce specific programs to assist students through the transfer process specifically to improve transfer outcomes.

The countless benefits of more individuals with a bachelor's level education speak directly to the need for institutions to implement successful vertical transfer programs to foster successful student transfer.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. REQUEST FOR RECRUITMENT ASSISTANCE

Dear [*insert Senior Student Affairs Officer title and name here*],

I am a doctoral candidate from the Higher Education Doctoral Program at the University of North Dakota, and I am working with Dr. Carolyn Ozaki on a research study investigating vertical transfer programming. I am reaching out to request your support for this upcoming research, which has been approved by the UND Institutional Review Board. As you know, the need for student affairs practitioners to adapt to our changing student populations, underscores the importance of effectively and consistently creating and improving programming to address their needs to support their success. To this end, this study is intended to provide insight into how institutions create and improve vertical transfer programming.

A key aspect of this study is the selection of a range of participants who may hold varying levels of participation with your institution's transfer programming. Your division of student affairs, along with student affairs divisions at one other institution, is being invited to participate in the study. The two invited institutions were purposefully chosen due to its partner transfer program. An additional component of selecting participants is the need to identify participants with a range of experiences and responsibilities. To achieve this, we are seeking participants who hold entry-level, mid-level, and senior-level positions who create, improve and are connected with transfer programming, as well as students who have or are participating in the program. It is important to note that we are hoping to discover a range of viewpoints.

The method used for this study, a case study method, requires a wide array of voices, meaning at least as many participants as you are able to provide to begin. I may consider interviewing other potential participants upon staff recommendation. In fact, we are seeking participants from the [*insert institution name*] Division of Student Affairs or related division. Due to the need for those participants to represent particular position levels and areas, we are hoping you may be able to assist us in identifying individuals from your institution to invite to participate in this study. To account for an anticipated response rate of 50%, **we are requesting identification of as many potential participants representing the six categories below:**

For the purposes of selecting individuals, example titles and departments representing the various position levels and functional areas have been included below:

- *Entry-level:* examples include admission associate, recruitment associates, administrative assistant, records associate, etc.

- *Mid-level:* sample titles include associate director, assistant director, transfer coordinator, etc.

- *Senior-level:* sample titles include director, dean, assistant vice president, vice president, etc.

- *Service-oriented area:* example areas include financial aid, campus bookstore, registrar, etc.

- *Program-oriented area:* example areas include transfer programming, new student programs, student activities, leadership programs, residential programming, etc.

Participants will be asked questions about their respective institution's transfer programming, their involvement with the program, and answer questions related to their responsibility level for transfer programming, and position. This activity should take about one hour to complete. Participants will also have the opportunity nominate others who many not have been initially nominated, as well as to volunteer for a follow-up interview to clarify their viewpoints. Please note that you may include yourself in the list of potential participants, if you are interested. While participants will be informed that they were nominated to participate in the study by their SSAO, any individual who is invited to participate in the study may choose not to participate at all or to stop participating at any point during the study.

Please let me know if you are willing to assist with participant identification at your institution. If you are willing to assist, only the institutional email addresses of those selected are needed. **A response, either way, is appreciated by [*insert date*].**

If you would like any clarification regarding the study aims or participant selection, or if you have other questions, please feel free to contact me at kaylyn.bondy@und.edu or 701-770-7672 or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Carolyn Ozaki, at carolyn.ozaki@und.edu or 701-777-4256. Alternately, if you have questions about participant rights, or complaints about this research, you may contact the UND Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279 or und.irb@und.edu.

Thank you for your consideration!

Kaylyn Bondy, Doctoral Candidate Higher Education Doctoral Program
University of North Dakota

APPENDIX B. EMAIL INVITATION AND REMINDER TEXT

Invitation Text: Dear [*name*],

You have been nominated by your [*insert SSAO title and name*] as someone who can provide a valuable contribution to a study concerning the creation and improvement of transfer programming. Participation will involve about 60 minutes of your time.

I hope you are willing to volunteer your time to provide your helpful feedback for this dissertation research study. If you are willing to participate, or have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at kaylyn.bondy@und.edu or 701-770-7672, or you may contact Dr. Carolyn Ozaki at carolyn.ozaki@und.edu or 701-777-4256. Alternately, if you have questions about participant rights, or complaints about this research, you may contact the UND Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279 or und.irb@und.edu.

Thank you in advance for your participation!

Kaylyn Bondy, Doctoral Candidate Higher Education Doctoral Program
University of North Dakota

Reminder Text: Dear [name],

As a reminder, you have been nominated by your [*insert SSAO title and name*] as a potential participant in a study concerning the creation and improvement of transfer programming. If you have already participated in the study, please disregard this email and thank you for your time.

If you have not yet participated, please consider doing so. The study will take about 60 minutes of your time, and your feedback will provide a valuable contribution to my dissertation research. If you are willing to participate, or have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at kaylyn.bondy@und.edu or 701-770-7672, or you may contact Dr. Carolyn Ozaki at carolyn.ozaki@und.edu or 701-777-4256.

APPENDIX C. STAFF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

As an introduction, the following questions will be asked:

Tell me about your role at the institution.

How have you been involved in transfer programming?

Using the Plan section of the PDSA Cycle the following questions will be asked:

Tell me the story of the beginning of this program.

Describe how and why this program began. What sparked its origination?

Describe who was involved with its origination.

Describe initial goals of this program.

What questions existed as the program took off?

What did the program set out to accomplish, what were the goals? How did you see that playing out?

Did you have benchmarks?

Describe the plan (who, what, where, when, why) to carry out the program.

Describe the data used to evaluate the program. What did your initial assessment plan look like?

Using the Do section of the PDSA Cycle the following questions will be asked:

Describe what it looked like to begin the program.

Describe and problems or unexpected observations with the program.

Using the Study section of the PDSA Cycle the following questions will be asked:

How did you measure effectiveness? What does the data tell you?

Were measurements imposed or did those evolve?

Tell me about your first evaluation of the program? Did you stick with the plan? Did it play out the way you predicted? Was there anything that didn't?

Describe initial learnings.

Describe initial strengths and/or weaknesses of the program.

From your perspective, what does it look like based on your goals for a student to go through this program? Do you think that is the experience of students?

Using the Act section of the PDSA Cycle the following questions will be asked:

Describe any changes that have been made to the program.

Using the Deming's Model for Improvement the following questions will be asked:

Describe changes needed to create improvement.

How will changes be documented as improvement is implemented?